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# Potterat and the War

By

Benjamin Vallotton

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"Propos du Commissaire Potterat," "Monsieur Potterat se marie," etc.



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## CHAPTER I

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" I LIKE this place immensely ! " and with a wide sweep of both arms towards the horizon, David Potterat added: " The Alps on the left, the Jura on the right, the Lake in front, the Jorat behind, the sun blazing away in the heavens, a garden, and me in the middle of it. . . . What more could a man want ? "

So then, after a career full of honours and of dangers, the retired Police Superintendent had settled down to cultivate his flowers, grow salads, and employ his detective talents in tracking down snails and slugs.

Was it really nine years since he and his wife and two cats had come to live in this old house, above whose doorway, half hidden by the climbing ivy, might be read the poetic name 'Eglantine Cottage.' . . . Nine years ! But happiness is not to be measured by years.

Often would Potterat lean upon his spade, and look up at the house, the overhanging eaves of which made it look like an old face in a poke bonnet. With a musically monotonous note the fountain behind the thicket plashed ceaselessly into its basin; and the arched door of the shed, the dormer windows, the laurels, and the thousand and one flowers which faithfully came to keep tryst with the seasons, the jasmine, honeysuckle, tulips, larkspurs, carnations, and roses, lay always under the magic of its voice.

Potterat loved to sit on the bench in the shade, and smoke his pipe after the day's work. The fragrance of coffee roasting in preparation for the evening meal, and

the scent of the flowers borne on the warm air, mingled with the fragrant tobacco smoke, made an atmosphere which it was good to breathe, which invigorated both mind and body.

In the spotless kitchen, the deal table, the wooden benches, the saucepans, the pots and pans, cups and saucers, patterned with blue forget-me-nots, conveyed a suggestion of peaceful torpor after many meals. In the thickness of the wall a door opened on six steps leading down to a cool cellar, where two casks reposed, in company with pots of jam in orderly rows. A second cellar served as a general storeroom, workshop, and woodshed.

All these, however, shrank into unimportance beside 'the room,' a good-sized chamber, not so small as to make one feel cramped, nor so large as to make one feel lost in it. Two windows, in deep embrasures, admitted a discreet amount of light to the faded wallpaper on which shepherdesses disported themselves; and to the old furniture, ranged along the walls in orderly regularity. Here were some shooting prizes, handsomely framed, and the commissions of the master of the house to his various grades, from sergeant to superintendent; some photographs of heavily moustached policemen, others of fellow-members of the brass band to which he belonged; one of a smiling grandmother, whom the artist had represented as standing by a cage of brilliantly plumaged birds; and lastly, resplendent in their bridal veils, Potterat's two wives, side by side on one wall, beamed on a portrait of Potterat himself on the opposite wall, Potterat in full uniform, the buttons of which shone out from the dark cloth like dandelions on a grassy field, and with his chest well thrown out. When the original of the portrait sat on the sofa below, it could easily be seen that the painter, in spite of all his efforts, had not done full justice to Potterat's radiant cheeks, his plump, easy-going good-nature, his merry eyes, and the smiling

gaiety of the whole face which arched his eyebrows, wrinkled up his nose, creased his double chin, and made his cheekbones glisten.

"That man of mine," Madame Potterat would say. "He's always got his joke!"

For nine years his laugh had filled Eglantine Cottage. The first few months of his settling there, however, had not been without a certain melancholy. With the contradictoriness of human nature, whilst he was in uniform, promenading the streets, keeping vigilant guard, Superintendent Potterat was always longing for the country, recalling the sights and sounds of his childhood in Thierrens, a remote country village, and at Bioley-Orjulaz; yet when he had retired to private life and the peaceful cultivation of a garden, he yearned for the excitements of life in the Police. But very soon Potterat banished these weaknesses as unworthy of a man with so perfect a digestion as his.

A true son of the earth, a lover of trees, of blue horizons of wandering paths, he appreciated the minutes wasted here and there in the mornings and evenings in watching the promontories of the Lake, and the play of the light on the translucent water.

"It is like a scene on the stage!" said he to his wife.

"Except that there are no actors."

"Actors? . . . What about you, and me, and the hens, and the cats, and the bats, and the swallows! We make up our parts as we go. . . . There is nothing so untrue to life as the theatre! When I was a policeman, I used to have to go there sometimes, in my professional capacity. I generally sat up at the back of the gallery. . . . Talk about actors! It took them three hours, sometimes four, to get to the point of saying 'I love you!' and this in good pieces, mind you! In the other sort . . . nothing but inconstant husbands, light women, emancipated girls, illegitimate births, revolver



shooting, in fact, 'the devil and all his works'! Often have I seen women apparently breathing their last, lying flat on the linoleum! But I only laughed in my sleeve. I knew very well that I should see them the next day as usual, tiptoeing about on their little high-heeled shoes, their faces whiter with powder than a plasterer's! No, in the theatre, everything is made-up, artificial; in the country, everything is natural."

Madame Potterat, also born in the country, and later transplanted to the town, a milliner before she became the wife of a gardener, had felt somewhat the same as her husband. Her feelings were different, however; more hidden, but perhaps stronger and more enduring. While she was in daily contact with velvets, plumes, aigrettes, ostrich feathers, artificial flowers, etc., she used to indulge in wonderful dreams of some grand future. Now, leaning over the cradle of a young Potterat, she built castles in the air for her son, saw him at last married to some high-born damsel. . . . Meantime, what was to be his name? . . . Gerard? . . . Gontran? . . . Hugo? . . . Fedor? . . . Sweeping all these high-sounding names aside contemptuously, Potterat insisted on his being christened 'Charles.'

"Give him a decent name that won't attract attention!" he said.

By dint of coaxing, Madame Potterat persuaded him to allow the child to be called 'Carlo' instead of 'Charles,' and for the sake of peace Potterat gave in.

"All right, call him 'Carlo'! That won't make him die a day sooner!"

Only a hedge separated Potterat's garden from that of his son-in-law, Justin Schmid. The two men did not get on well together; one all good-nature, sociable, talkative, animated; the other silent, reserved, jealous of the little pension which enabled his father-in-law to live in tolerable comfort without anxiety. That his



father-in-law, in addition to this, had the cheek to sell some of his vegetables and fruit amongst his friends and to the cooks of some rich families plunged Schmid into a fury of jealous resentment that was perfectly obvious to everyone, in spite of his silence. The great jovial laughs that rang out at every turn from the garden the other side of the hedge were detestable to him; and, moreover, his father-in-law's continual jokes on a certain subject annoyed him exceedingly.

"And the son and heir? . . . When is he going to appear? . . . You must tell Louise to hurry up. Ours is already two months old. . . . It would be pretty, an uncle and a nephew of the same age. . . ."

Carlo was still a baby in arms when Louise at last had a boy. They called him Louis. Tenderly, Potterat and his wife bent over the new baby, who wailed continually.

"What a great whopping boy!"

"He is the image of you, Louise," said Madame Potterat, "but he is going to be fair, like his father. . . ."

"Too bad!" murmured Potterat softly. Then aloud: "How d'ye do, young man? How do you like this world? . . . It might be better, hey! . . . and it might be worse. You have to take the rough with the smooth. . . . In another seventy years or so, you will be nearly ready to leave it again. You will have had bad times and good times, like everybody else. The great thing is to have a good digestion and a good conscience. The rest will look after itself."

Schmid, taciturn and dour, watched his father-in-law out of the corner of his eye.

"Was there ever such a deaf-mute of a man! If the good God, at the Judgment Day, demands account of every idle word, his examination won't take long!"

So thought Potterat to himself a little later, as he planted tomatoes. This work done, he filled his watering-cans, walked about with short steps, holding the water-

ing-pot at arm's length, his huge apron standing out round him, his braces lost in the folds of his shoulders, his face radiant with happiness in this beautiful month of May.

On the other side of the hedge, Justin Schmid performed the same work in grim silence, methodically, sparing of distances, of trouble, sparing also of manure, the heap of which had scarcely diminished at all. More prodigal, the sun shone impartially on the twin gardens, on the house with its two entrances, glanced off the edge of a tool, penetrated in shafts into a clump of raspberry bushes. Along a path, with its tail high, its whiskers flying on the wind, begging for caresses, the cat Mi-Fou joined his master.

"You're getting old, my friend," said Potterat to him. "How is the lumbago?"

Mi-Fou mewed by way of reply.

"That's right!" said his master. "I like cats who talk, I do!"

These words were carried by the wind to the ears of Justin Schmid. Others followed them:

"You're planting those tomatoes too closely. . . . They want plenty of room. . . . You must give them space to fill out properly, to look at each other, to get a good bright red. . . ."

This advice annoyed Schmid exceedingly. Potterat was rather fond of giving advice. Grumpily he replied in a gruff voice:

"Everyone's got his own way of doing things!"

"Cross-grained brute!" muttered Potterat to himself, as he picked up a fresh watering-can. "Always cranky, suspicious, obstinate, sneering. . . . Oh, he's a nice specimen to have for a neighbour!"

Potterat delighted in the society of his fellows. He was never happy without an audience. Nothing pleased him so much as the social evenings spent amongst his

friends, the time-honoured toasts drunk in company, the little stories which provoked roars of laughter.

He belonged to a Choral Society, was a member of a huge brass band called 'La Brise du Lac,' and of various other societies for mutual improvement. To indulge still more his sociable taste, he had even cut some openings in the hedge which bordered the road, and at one or other of these he might often be seen, leaning with folded arms on the battlement of foliage, his broad shoulders filling up the space completely.

"How are things going in the Police?" he inquired one day of Sergeant Delessert, as he passed.

Delessert eyed longingly a peach-tree laden with fruit, as he answered with a smile:

"The Police? . . . Oh, everything's changing. . . . In your time things were pretty easy-going. Now the discipline is simply Prussian. . . . Ah, you retired at the right time. . . . Fine time you have here! You plant, you reap, you eat your own peaches! . . ."

A little ashamed of his easy life, Potterat returned to the subject:

"What's the latest news at the Station?"

"Oh, the same old round: they catch the little thieves, and let the big thieves go free. . . . A fortnight ago, they ran in Bélisaire again, for the thirty-second time. . . . Begging, peddling without a licence, poaching, . . . but you know him better than I do! . . . He came out on Saturday. So look out for your fruit! He's prowling about this neighbourhood, I believe!"

"Ho, the devil he is! That explains some things! . . ."

For some days, as a matter of fact, some mysterious being had been groping with grimy hands among the downy peaches. Potterat had put it down to the black-birds at first.

One evening, soon after this, as eleven o'clock was just striking, and the moon came out suddenly from

behind a cloud, Potterat's fist closed firmly on a thin shoulder, and dragged into the tool-shed a man with an old hat pulled down on his ears, a shabby bent back, and frail legs lost in the accordion-like folds of trousers much too large for him.

"Well, I'm dashed!" spluttered Potterat. "People may steal bread if they're hungry, but not peaches. Just you wait till I get a spade-handle—I've got a good hard one here—and I'll give you a thrashing you won't forget in a hurry! . . . The cheek of the beggar! . . . Coming after my peaches! . . ."

The moon threw on the wall of the garden the shadows of Potterat's portly corporation, and the emaciated figure of the thief in a comical silhouette. In the shed a lantern was lighted.

"It is him, right enough!" breathed Potterat. 'Him' being none other than Bélisaire, the spoilt child of the Police, the incorrigible drunkard, innocent and gentle as a child, the timid pilferer, a true gipsy, loving the open roads, the hedges, the woods, the wayside inns at cross-roads; Belisaire, dirty and in rags, a quid of tobacco always in his left cheek, bright-eyed, and with a matted beard.

"Wretch!" began Potterat, in a voice, however, so deep and so kindly, in spite of the circumstances, that tears came to the eyes of the incorrigible old dreamer. "At your age, to creep through fences, to climb plum-trees! . . . You're mad, quite mad! Nobody else in the world would think of doing such things! . . . Well, well! . . . To be robbing orchards when you are old enough to be a grandfather!"

A silence followed these words. Half turned away, Bélisaire's narrow, rather foxy face could no longer be seen, but only his sharp, Punch-like profile.

"Ah, things are very different now from what they were when you were in the Police! For nothing at all



scarcely, they run me in now on the ground that I am a worry to them. . . . I can't roam about now as I used to do. People don't understand things nowadays! . . . Oh, one time or another, some wet night, I'll have to buy a bit of rope . . . there's always a tree handy! . . ."

With arms folded across his chest, moved by that plaintive voice, Potterat looked at Bélisaire: "What a lot of white in his beard!" thought he. "And is it really quite the thing for you, prosperous, retired, twice married, to be so hard on this tramp? This poor, lonely, feeble old man!"

"Look here, Bélisaire," said he at last, with a kindness in his voice that the sharp ears of the old man were quick to note, "how many weeks in the month are you drunk?"

A growl was the only reply.

"Now, see here! You're fond of the country, aren't you? Planting, watering, weeding, gathering fruit and vegetables, smoking a pipe while you dig a little now and then—that ought to suit you pretty well, eh?"

"Oh, one might do worse! . . ."

"Well, would you like to have a job here for some days? If all goes well, we can come to some agreement. I want someone to help me just now. There are such a lot of little things to be done in the garden at this season, that I cannot keep pace with them all. And I have lately bought a couple of goats too: I'll have to rent a piece of meadow-land, and mow it. . . . You can have a shake-down in the garret, an old coat from time to time, five francs at the end of every month, and your food, and I don't think that's at all a bad offer for a man like you! . . . But remember, if you make a beast of yourself, if you come home drunk once too often, out you go! . . . An old man like you, full of rheumatism, and with a bad cough! It's about time you thought of settling down, isn't it? Well, what do you

say? Yes, or no? If no, then up to the police-station you go for stealing my plums! If yes, I'll take you up to the garret at once."

Bélisaire saw in imagination a plate of hot soup for him at a corner of the table; a bed of his own in a garret where one could through the little round window touch the tiles, the topmost branches of the lime-trees, talk to the cats and the birds. . . . This garden, too, appealed to him. . . . Not to mention that he was to be allowed some little latitude! . . . Overcome with emotion, Bélisaire sat down, touched to the heart by the kindness that was being shown him, and Potterat understood that he accepted the conditions.

"Come along then! . . . To-morrow I'll show you what to do."

So Bélisaire took his place in the little household. Quite a handy man in his way, he mended the tools, repaired the canary's cage, and generally did his best to make himself useful. Madame Potterat, however, insisted on his taking an occasional bath in the Lake, and gave him a towel and a piece of soap. Bélisaire always returned clean, but slightly drunk, and when they scolded him, he replied gently: "Baths don't agree with me!" Bélisaire grew quite attached to the household—the very way they pronounced his name showed a kindly feeling towards him; they gave him some tobacco; Carlo smiled at him from his cradle. Yet in spite of all this, he disappeared once or twice, to come back, creeping in noiselessly, penitent, half starved, tearful: happy to find himself once more before the big soup tureen, happy even in the scoldings which showed he was cared for.

"Ha! So there you are, you silly owl!" Potterat would remark perhaps, and that was all. However, as one ages, one grows tired of everything, even of roaming. The tramp himself acknowledged this: he said to himself:



"To be a wanderer is all very well, up to about sixty. . . . After that one ought to settle down. . . ."

As November lessened the necessary work of the garden, and Bélisaire, with so much spare time on his hands, was beginning to show signs of falling away again, Potterat said to him one day:

"I say, suppose we put up a fowl-house? . . . I believe we could build a really good one between us . . . like some of those model poultry houses one sees in catalogues. . . ."

"Right you are!"

Madame Potterat joined in the discussions: the chicken-house appealed to her:

"I should like this design, I think," she said. "It is very ornamental, yet quite rustic and simple."

"All right! Leave it to us."

For some time the two men worked on it. They plaited the thatch. They finished it off by painting little green and white shutters on the outsides of the house. An inclined plank led up to the front door, and above this door was a shield, on which could be read the motto "Liberty and Country." And below this couplet:

"The man who works, and the fowl that lays,  
Are equally worthy of all men's praise."

A little fence marked off the boundaries of the poultry domain. . . . When all was ready, they made a big openwork crate, and with this on a handcart they set off to buy their stock. Their return was heralded by protesting squawks, continuous cacklings, energetic quackings, etc., as the vehicle bumped over the stones of the road.

"Here comes Barnum's Menagerie!" shouted some wit of a passer-by.

"Yes, and if you want a job, there's still a vacancy amongst the monkeys," retorted Potterat haughtily.

Bélisaire stalked on, quite oblivious of these silly jokes, his hands pushing the shafts, his scanty beard floating on the wind, one eye half closed, his thin body enveloped in an old overcoat, so faded that no one could tell the original colour. The neighbours, Burnand, Griotte, Bigarreau, watched the unpacking of the crate. The ducks and drakes waddled out placidly, the turkeys uttered wild, raucous cries, the geese promenaded along gravely, their heads held high in air, the cock and hens streamed along in a frightened procession. Schmid himself presently appeared on the scene. Half jealously, he watched the proceedings, but made only one remark:

"You're wasting a lot of space over them. . . ."

Enthusiastically, Potterat expounded his idea:

"Well, nothing annoys me more than to see the little pigsties that some people think good enough for poultry. . . . No, they need plenty of room, and a tree or two for those who like a view . . . and a stream for the ducks . . . and plenty of roosts of different heights for the fowls. . . . Then you'll have plenty of good eggs. . . . I'll guarantee them to be full weight and more . . . and they'll have the taste of fresh air and sunshine and health. . . . There are some eggs that are positively unwholesome to eat, because the fowls are kept mewed up in coops."

When the neighbours had gone, he said to his wife:

"Did you hear Schmid? Nothing but fault-finding and objections. . . . He's the sort of man I simply can't stand. . . ."

"Do be quiet, David. For Louise's sake it's better to say nothing. After all, each of you has his own garden. . . . What's the good of letting him worry you? Everyone has his own way."

"That's true; and I prefer mine."

As one knows, Potterat was a man of fixed opinions and settled ways. On the first Sunday of every month

he always went to church: a matter of duty and habit. It mattered little to him who happened to be preaching. Seated on the last bench, in the shadow of the organ loft, he listened to the droning of the preacher's voice, slept a little generally, during the development of the preacher's 'secondly' and 'thirdly,' then woke up in time to rise and sing with the rest of the congregation. In summer, how small the congregations were! 'Decidedly,' thought Potterat, 'church is going out of fashion.' Outside, the bustle of traffic, the smart toilettes which one could not help seeing through the big plate-glass windows, which had cost twenty francs the square yard, the various notes of the motor horns, all said to the people seated on those hard benches:

"What are you doing there? . . . Come out and enjoy yourselves." While all the time the voice from the pulpit upheld spiritual blessings as opposed to temporal welfare.

At the midday dinner, before a plate laden with beef and vegetables, Potterat would give utterance to his thoughts.

"Religion, nowadays, is a delicate matter. If you preach the devil and hell fire, you shock people. . . . If you say that everyone will be saved . . . 'Well, then, what does it matter? Here goes.' . . . If you try to combine the two points of view, they don't understand what you're driving at. . . . Oh, it's jolly difficult. . . . Then again, these aeroplanes, they don't help religion much. . . . You see, all these flying men, they go right up into the sky, and find nothing but clouds there. . . . On the other hand, we are not exactly outside with the dogs, at least, not all of us. Religion is a good thing, but it's hard to practise. Yet one must have it. The great thing is, I should think, to know how to present it: A description of beautiful scenery, which might well be taken from our mountains, a country modelled on

our motto 'One for all, all for one' . . . a word about death and resurrection . . . a judgment which is not too discouraging, something kindly and welcoming, where one could explain his case, plead extenuating circumstances, and all that. . . . If you expect perfection, you see, nothing can be done. . . . We all know too well what life is. . . . There are times when it is most necessary to prevaricate, to finesse . . . in dealing with people. . . . Yes, to attract people, religion must be democratic, popular. What do you think, Bélisaire?"

Half frightened, Bélisaire fixed his eyes on his plate.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't had time to think of these things, I've never had decent enough clothes to go to church. . . ."

Madame Potterat seized her husband's arm:

"Don't talk about these things before the child. He begins to understand. . . ."

"So much the better. What I say is only common sense. . . ."

When April came in again, Potterat, choosing a fine afternoon, betook himself to the cemetery. He pruned the shrubs growing round the grave of his first wife, so that her name, graved on the stone, could be clearly seen: 'Jenny Potterat.' Some blackbirds were singing: under the overhanging arch of heavy foliage, their voices melted away.

"You see that I remember," said Potterat.

He paid a visit also to the tomb of Bolomey, the first husband of his present wife. To him, he said simply, "Greeting!" He said it very sincerely, out of the sociable friendliness of his heart. Then he wandered along the paths amongst the graves. 'I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,' ran the inscription on the tombstone of a man who had hanged himself. That other had drunk away a fortune. This woman had been divorced. . . . Ah! when one has been thirty years in



the Police, one gets to know all these little histories. . . . "Decidedly," he thought, "it would seem almost better that the good God should not know everything. . . . There's too much wickedness altogether going on in this world. . . . I don't believe He'll ever be able to manage a wholesale resurrection. He'll have to raise them in sections, about twenty per cent., not more. . . ."

Each year Potterat had much the same impressions and thoughts. Presently he went back to his wife's grave, picked some of the violets that dotted the grass round about in splashes of beautiful colour, and went away, carrying his empty watering-can. In the newer part of the cemetery, the headstones were very white, and there were many faded bouquets and tawdry glass ornaments. Occasionally he met a funeral procession, with the coffin almost hidden by flowers, and the train of mourners and friends bathed in the light of the setting sun.

"A funeral wants music," he thought. "Prayers are all very well. But there's nothing like a hymn, and a beautiful air played by a band. That touches the heart more than anything. . . ."

On his return to the house, he said to his wife:

"I've just been to see them at the cemetery. . . . They're sleeping very peacefully. . . ."

The seasons passed, each one bringing its accustomed occupations and duties. In the spring, his broad chest outlined by a green apron, the pruning scissors in his hand, and some strands of raffia between his teeth, Potterat wandered about the paths of his garden lopping off a too advanced bud here, a wandering branch there; and the raspberry bushes, peach trees, plum and apple trees, were subjected to a daily inspection. . . . The click of his pruning scissors was heard continually. Excited by the warmth and sunshine, the hens laid eggs and cackled incessantly. The grapes ripened, the garden was filled with perfume. . . . In the birds' nests, little

chirpings were heard, and presently, the nestlings began to make their first flights. . . . Potterat, reigning paternally over this little world of open beaks, would catch Mi-Fou, and shut him up in the cellar day after day, not, however, without explaining to him the reason for this imprisonment:

"Everyone must live, you know. . . . And to eat them when they don't yet know how to fly is not exactly the thing, Mi-Fou. . . . Wait until by-and-by, when they come after my strawberries. . . . Then you can creep along on your stomach, and leap suddenly on them, to your heart's content. You can carry off the biggest of them into the hedge at the minute when he is going to eat my finest strawberries. . . . There, that's all fair and square . . . . If you steal . . . I'll eat you. . . . Do you understand?" . . .

Seated on the top of a packing-case, Mi-Fou mewed "Yes."

In the evenings some people came for vegetables. There was a little procession of cooks: Eva, Olga, Aimée, etc.; some members of Potterat's band; some friends from Ouchy; Logeon, known to his friends as Forget-me-not; Noverraz, nicknamed Me-and-my-Boots; another friend, who rejoiced in the name of Bluebeard, a giant of a fellow, terrible in a scuffle, with his short pipe clutched between his teeth; and Delessert, and the flute-player of the Ouchy Orchestra, who bought vegetables for his little band, and Regamey the accountant, who was always talking about defending the frontiers, and some police constables who had a weakness for tomatoes, etc. They all met in Potterat's porch, and chatted as they waited.

"How much did that nose of yours cost you?" . . . Delessert asked Bélisaire. "It must have run you into close upon ten thousand francs."

Bélisaire, watering the strawberries, merely remarked



that it was a safe investment, and, having emptied his watering-pot, philosophically filled his pipe.

"My mistress spends a thousand francs a year on perfume alone," said Eva, a thin, red-haired woman, in white cap and apron.

"And mine thinks only of her two dogs. The master and the children are nowhere. It is everything for those dogs. They must have their hot bath every day. . . . And they are so disgustingly fat that they can hardly walk upstairs. . . ."

"What a wicked woman!" remarked Delessert.

And Bluebeard added gloomily:

"They're all cracked—these rich people."

"Oh, nonsense! . . . It takes all sorts to make a world," Potterat put in, anxious to be conciliatory.

"After all, everybody has a hobby of some kind: scent, dogs, the bottle, the banjo, stamps. . . . They must kill time somehow!"

Madame Potterat closed the discussion by saying:

"Oh, don't say a word against riches. Just think how delightful to be able to do as one likes, to order what one likes, to have nice furniture, and clothes . . . to go to parties. . . ."

From June onwards, it was a beautiful summer. . . . The long hot hours went by, laden with perfume, vibrating with the sound of many wings; the garden was a perfect blaze of flowers; they picked baskets full of cherries. . . . Closed shutters made patches of green on the white walls of the house, the stream dried up, the ducks sought every scrap of shade. The white hats of some school-girls on their daily walk might be seen bobbing up and down above the hedge as they passed. . . . Lots of jam was made. . . . Potterat weighed out the sugar, helped to stone the plums, tasted all the pots, and pinched the cheeks of Louis and Carlo, whose faces were perpetually sticky with sugar and besmeared with jam.

"That's enough, David," Madame Potterat would say.  
"The children will be ill."

"Nonsense! It won't do them any harm. Jam's good for them."

Then halfway through August, Potterat took the honey from the two hives, with Bigarreau's aid. He donned a thick veil round his head, a pair of gloves on his hands, and tied up the ends of his trousers, yet in spite of this an occasional angry bee would find a means of getting in somewhere. Then there were yells:

"D——n the beast!" . . . a flight into the bushes, frenzied gestures, low crouchings, energetic rubbings. . . .

"Don't get so excited!" cried Bigarreau. "One would think you were finishing up a patriotic speech."

"A-ee! A-ouh!" replied Potterat, doubled up behind a dwarf apple-tree. The bee had planted its sting in the nape of his neck, on which he rained blows like hail with his fist.

"Damn! Every year they sting me in the very same place."

"If they sting you in the same place as last year, you ought not to feel anything."

After that Potterat kept at a safe distance, giving much lordly advice in a stentorian voice, holding a leek pressed on the back of his neck, and ready to dart off into the bushes at a moment's notice.

Followed by a golden cloud, the frames were withdrawn, one by one, from the hives, and carried into the wash-house, the windows of which were tightly closed. Armed with a sharp-edged trowel, Bigarreau cut out the combs. With his coat off and his sleeves rolled up to the elbow, Potterat turned the handle of the extractor, ten turns or so slowly at first, then quicker and quicker. The machine droned like a great bumble-bee, and the honey suddenly flowing out noiselessly into the waiting pots seemed like an imprisoned ray of sunshine, rejoiced

to be free again. . . . Outside, the whole garden resounded with a loud quarrelsome hum. The bees flew furiously about, dashing madly, in their blind rage, against the windows, circling the house a hundred times, flying into the hive, and then coming out again more enraged than ever. Bélisaire from time to time weighed the pots. "Ten kilos . . . fifteen kilos. . . . How good it tastes. . . . It is as if one were grinding up flowers."

"You'll spoil it if you go on doing that," protested Potterat.

At last they had finished, and at nightfall they regained the house where Madame Potterat and Carlo, with all windows and doors prudently shut up, waited the close of the operations.

"Close the door!" someone cried, as they entered.

The savoury omelette, the salad, the ham, the fragrant coffee, the good wine, were very inviting. . . . The full moon rose higher and higher above the tree-tops.

"Bélisaire and I are both trying to make ourselves as like the man in the moon as possible," declared Potterat. "His nose is swollen until it seems to be floating over his face, and one of his eyes looks towards the Jura. . . . I've got a neck so swollen that you can't tell where the neck ends and the chin begins. . . . We do look pretty, to be sure! . . . We should do for a show. . . . But I'm your own old Potterat all the same. . . . And I'm as happy as a king. That's a fact. . . . Yesterday I was passing one of those new blocks of flats five stories high. Everybody was out on their verandas to get a breath of fresh air, and everybody looked bored to death. On the ground floor, because they had eaten too much at dinner; on the first floor, because they had been out late dancing the night before; on the second floor, because they were trying to ape their betters; on the third because they had not enough amusement or variety; on the fourth because they were sleepy; and on

the fifth because they were jealous of the others. . . . But we, now, we're all right; we eat our own ham from our own pig, salad from our own garden, honey from our own hives. . . . We are all right."

Now that the bees had settled down in their hives again, the windows were opened, and Potterat breathed deeply, drawing in the fragrance of the warm earth. "The good brown earth!" he thought. "How it does its work, nourishing the box-borders, pushing out the spinach, the cabbages and cauliflowers, and the rest, and sending the sap right up to the tops of the trees. . . ."

"It's a jolly fine life in the Police, but it's not a patch upon the life of a gardener. . . ."

"What about the weeds?" objected Bélisaire, as he tenderly rubbed his bent spine.

"Oh, they're all right. If we had no weeds, we should get too lazy altogether. . . ."

Potterat loved the beautiful Lake over which he gazed every day not only for its romantic beauty, but also for the fish which it hid in its bosom. For a mere trifle, Bluebeard would let his boat to his friends, and then Potterat, Vidoudez, Sergeant Delessert, and, when he could get a day off, Regamey, the double bass of the band, would board it cautiously, and Bluebeard, with a vigorous push, and a parting shout of "Good luck!" would send it out into deep water, not without a little qualm on the part of those not much accustomed to small boats.

Now in a journey on land, it is merely a matter of mutual agreement for the trip to be a success. But once on the water, well, there one is, and there one's got to stay. One can't say "I've had enough of this. I'm going home." Fortunately, however, this boat's crew were very congenial. Delessert, the Sergeant, made one think of a bantam cock. Precise, punctual, with prominent eyes, one could tell by his alert, upright



carriage, as well as by his mania for foretelling exceptional luck in fishing, or fearsome storms, that he had an unusually vivid imagination.

As for Regamey, he was always either in the clouds or in the depths. He enjoyed everything with the keenest zest, yet he had his hours of depression, of moody silence. . . . It was easy to see that Vidoudez was a clerk in a counting-house, from his chubby fingers, always stained with red ink. Fond of good living, original and full of fun and life, careless as to public opinion, he had had an unhappy married life. Now divorced, he consoled himself with his pipe.

Potterat, with his cool self-confidence, his fiery indignation, tempered by his good-nature, his way of stirring up a quarrel and then ending it with a word, his good-humoured chaffing, above all, his big hearty laugh, made him the central figure of this band of friends. As he leaned overboard, drawing his hand idly through the water, his broad face beaming with delight shone reflected in the rippling wavelets. . . . From the edge of the Lake to the boat stretched, as it were, a sheet of light. Away off, on the flank of the hill, vineyard-covered slopes and little villages could be clearly seen, perched here and there on the hillside, with their deep hollows, and their little steep streets. . . . A fishing boat glided slowly past, with big slow sweeps of the oars. Potterat hailed the occupants:

"Hallo! Have you got any fish?"

"Oh, a good few. . . ."

"Are they all the same kind?"

Some lissom shadows glided about under the water.

"Don't they roam about, the gay creatures. There is no greater gadabout than a fish. . . . However, that's hardly their fault; when one has no hands one can't drive in a nail, or plane a board. . . ."

There fell a long silence. A woman on the bank was

washing clothes, the measured blows rang out over the water almost to the Savoy coast. Swans glided placidly about; the sky, the water, the mountains all were blue. One felt vaguely happy, bathed in the sweet warm air.

"Suppose the bottom of the boat were to fall out? . . ."

"That would be an awkward sort of thing to happen. The fat ones would float, the thin ones would go to the bottom. . . . Every man has his fate."

Presently they drew in the net, and a stream of silver poured into the bottom of the boat . . . little frisking fish.

"They're getting beastly small . . ." grumbled Potterat. "Long ago we used to catch fish twice and three times as big as these . . . nowadays they're positively midgets. . . . Thirty years ago we could scarcely draw up the nets . . . such big whoppers! . . . And we used to sit on the bank, in the shade of big trees . . . cool, and fresh, and delightful . . . we never even troubled to look at the float. . . . Just fix a worm on a hook and draw up your line and you had enough delicious fish for breakfast and supper, *fera*, with no more bones than a fillet of veal. . . . Ah, in those days there were fish in the lake, people in the churches, and grapes on the vines. . . . To-day, you may look for them. . . ."

"That's true," said Sergeant Delessert. "The fishing is not nearly so good as when I was a boy."

"Is it because we're growing more stupid, or because the fish are getting cleverer?" asked Vidoudez, but the question remained unanswered.

In spite of these pessimistic remarks, fish accumulated in the wicker baskets. The distant chiming of a clock came floating across the water; an express train rushed along the side of the Lake, throwing behind it on the still air its pennon of white smoke. Midday. They unpacked the luncheon basket. The corks flew. The bread, the ham, the cheese, the fruit seemed more de-



licious than usual, eaten like this away from the busy world. . . . A Lake steamer passed, gay with multi-coloured sunshades. An orchestra was playing on board, and the waves in the wash of the steamer seemed to dance to the measure of the waltz that was being played. With an impulse of joyous good-fellowship, Potterat raised his glass and drank to the health of all these unknown good people. He shouted:

"Here's to your very good health! . . . Hurrah for Switzerland! . . . Hurrah for the Canton de Vaud! . . ."

No one replied.

"Uncivil brutes! some of these foreigners. . . . If we wished we could kick them all out. . . ."

"My friend," said Vidoudez, "kindly feelings and politeness are out of fashion now. The other day there was a party of us at the Rochers de Naye, and we had intended to sing 'Hail, glaciers sublime!' at the rising of the sun, but I'm blest if we hadn't got to be quiet. . . . It's not the thing, nowadays, it appears. It is only on the Lake, two miles or more out, that one can begin to feel at home."

Everyone gave his opinion, and various suggestions were made for dealing with a situation that one of them characterized as 'past all bearing.' . . . At sunset, they came back to the shore, hearts and eyes alike filled with the exquisite peace and beauty of the Lake.

As soon as he got home, Potterat emptied his basket on the kitchen table, and seizing a fish by the tail, he threw it to Mi-Fou. "Here, little one, eat that and get strong."

December at last came round. Bélisaire, in red woollen gloves, covered the salads with dead leaves. One morning everything was covered with snow. The bran, mixed with hot water, that he was carrying to the fowl-house, smoked in the frozen air. Under its coating

of ice, the little brook sang no longer, and some snowflakes lingered in Bélisaire's beard.

Carlo, now six, was given a sledge for a Christmas present. From that moment he had only one idea:

"Father, let's go lugging. . . ."

For thirty years, first as policeman, then as superintendent, Potterat had been down on lugs and sliders, a race dreaded by old ladies and by busy people in a hurry. Was he now in his old age to join the ranks of these disturbers of the public peace? Also there were other considerations. Potterat said to himself:

"The last time you went lugging, it was at Bioley-Orjulaz, in 1870, the year when you got engaged. In those days, you were supple and quick on your feet, smart and lively and young, and as light as a feather. . . . The heavier one is, the faster the luge goes. . . . You'll be going over the gasometer, if you don't look out. . . ."

One evening, however, he decided:

"Get your luge, Carlo, and we'll go."

They joined the stream of lugs; Englishmen in white caps, slim young girls in bright-coloured jerseys, boys, shop assistants, cooks with untidy hair, and Bigarreau, and the pirate-like boatmen of Ouchy, and his comrades of the brass band, and even Bélisaire, a little tipsy, who came down the slope on a packing-case, which made a noise like heavy artillery charging down a hard road. . . . All ages, all types of humanity went up and down in the giddy procession, shouting, laughing, yelling, all intoxicated by rapid motion in the clear frosty air which stung their cheeks.

"Off we go!" yelled Potterat, fired with enthusiasm. . . . "It's quite easy. If we run too much to the left, you must stick your right heel down; if we go to the right, stick your left heel down. Now, are you ready? Go!"

"But I can't sit down properly," complained Carlo.  
"There's not enough room."

"Oh, don't talk so much. . . . Cling on anyhow . . . we're off. . . ."

What a pace! With a cloud of light snow encircling them like a halo.

"One can't see anything clearly," said Potterat  
"Look out! Look out!" he yelled. . . . His avalanche upset at the next turning. They clutched wildly at the ground with the nails of their shoes but to no purpose. Over went father and son, inextricably mixed up with each other, into a field of cabbages, where they found themselves at length sitting in a snowdrift.

"Bother!" shouted Potterat. "We were going all right, only we couldn't see properly. . . . But I know the way of it now. In going round a turn, you must just hug the slope, then lean away from the turn, then a touch of the heel on the right, a lurch to the left, and the corner is rounded. . . . Now off we go again. . . ."

They tried again, facing the landscape. A shock, a rapid whirl, and they brought up against the foot of a street lamp, in the arms of an English girl.

"People who go in for lugging ought to know how to guide a luge," said Potterat, with a cynical politeness. "It isn't the thing to crash into people from behind like that, people who are going along interfering with nobody. . . ."

"A-ow!" the young miss tried to apologize. Then Potterat was magnanimous:

"All right, all right! . . . but don't do it again. . . . It's against the rules. . . . Play the game, please. . . ."

After that, Potterat managed his own luge in a most finished style. His eyes starting almost out of his head, his mouth wide open, barking out excited directions

every moment, now addressing himself to the *piste*, now to the luge, vituperating it when it threatened to skid, he steered with energetic heels, pushed it on with his chest, reined it in with his stomach, at any rate in intention, if not in fact. Arrived at the bottom of the course, he was openly triumphant:

"Ah, not many can do that with a heavy load."

But his boasting was premature. Full speed down the *piste* came a luge, and crashed into him, chest to chest, the arms of the runaway clutching wildly the first thing they encountered; they spun round in a mad waltz, broken off abruptly by the trunk of a tree. Then a man every whit as fat as Potterat, out of breath, indignant, rose from the snow in which he was buried. Ready for the encounter, Potterat, flat on his stomach, jumped up with a quickness of which one would hardly have believed him capable. Suddenly, both gave a great shout of laughter, as Potterat recognized Bigarreau, and Bigarreau recognized Potterat. Potterat was the first to recover himself:

"My poor Bigarreau! Without our padding we should have been done for. . . . There is nothing like a good behind for softening a shock . . . it acts like a spring. . . ."

About ten o'clock Madame Potterat came to look for Carlo. Childhood has no secrets. Running to meet his mother, he shouted with immense delight:

"We were upset three times . . . once by ourselves, once with an English girl, and once with . . ."

"Bah!" said Potterat authoritatively. "What of that? It's the best luges who come the croppers!"

The winter was a long one. Twice a week in the evening, leaving his wife chatting to some neighbours, or buried in a book, Potterat betook himself to Etraz, where, over a friendly glass or two of the wine of the



country, a few friends were in the habit of meeting. Customs officials, postmen, retired civil servants of the lower ranks rathered round the little tables, and with shrewd common sense, not unminged with sarcasm, reviewed the events of the hour. At these times, they remade the map of Europe, they addressed imaginary remonstrances, of a somewhat primitive frankness, to the great ones of the earth; they brought out to the light of day the secrets of the Chancelleries, discussed openly the plots of the various diplomats, and their supposed motives.

"No one can tell me anything new about politics," declared Potterat. "I can always read between the lines; I study these questions; I spot their significant silences; . . . I look for the motives that are behind their actions, and I can generally find them. . . . When an Emperor goes about amongst the people distributing presents . . . a watch to this one, a diamond pin to that, I say to myself, 'So the lion-tamer distributes lumps of sugar to his beasts before he makes them go through their tricks. Now look out!'"

Potterat's opinion carried great weight. With him there were no surprises, no uncertainties, no opinions changing with every breath of wind. Consistently and always, he was opposed to strikes, which upset society and increased the cost of living; against the circulation of motor-cars on Sundays; against the hotels, and the huge blocks of flats, which brought crowds of people, as he used to say, coming and going like doves round about a dovecot; against Socialism, against Anarchy, against Women's Suffrage. . . .

"A woman's place is in the home. Knitting, sewing, bringing up children, cooking . . . that's her sphere. . . . We men will look after all the rest. . . ."

And as the sum of all his remarks, Potterat would freely give his friends his recipe for happiness;



"It is these enormous buildings of six and eight stories and more which are pouring folly and madness into the world. Man was never intended to exist in little pigeon holes. In the long run, it must turn his brain upside down, head over heels, or rather heels over head. No, to be really happy, a man must have both his feet firmly planted on the earth, wash his hands in the water of his own fountain, grow his own flowers and vegetables, pick his own fruit from his own trees, enjoy the fruit of his own labours. There is nothing better than that."

Forgetting for the moment their flat landings, with the mats before each door, and the dingy windows lighting the corridors, Potterat's hearers felt, as it were, the freshness of a garden steal into their hearts.

When the Cathedral clock sent out on the night twelve slow strokes, they left the little inn where they had their meetings. Sometimes a few insistent shadows would dog their footsteps for a while, and then the group would make remarks for their benefit:

"This is a nice sort of thing," Potterat would protest. "In Turkey, they say, women are never allowed to go out alone. In Central Europe, it's the men who will soon not be able to go out without a chaperon. These ladies with their indiarubber heels, one can't hear them coming. They creep up to one like a cat after sausages. . . . In my young days, women used to be modest. As for me, when I was twenty even, I was as innocent as a primrose. And when I was courting my first wife, ay and even my second, I used to blush if I only passed her house. But to-day. . . ."

On other evenings, Schmid and his wife and child would perhaps come to Eglantine Cottage for the evening. He, stiff, silent, and reserved as usual; she, a devoted little wife and mother; the child a fat little fellow, with an incredibly red head, as silent and reserved almost as

his father. After they went, Potterat always indulged in a grumble:

"What a son-in-law for a man to have! . . . He doesn't drink—he doesn't smoke—he saves every penny, forsooth. What a deadly bore of a fellow. . . . Nothing affable, nothing pleasant and agreeable, nothing comfortable about him. . . ."

Of all his favourite words and phrases, Potterat liked the word 'comfortable' best. It had such a lot of meaning, it expressed so much.

In February, the Brise du Lac orchestra gave a concert, in the big hall of the Café de la Navigation. Anxious to maintain their reputation, Potterat, Bigarreau, Regamey, and Bluebeard had frequent rehearsals of their parts in the hospitable sitting-room of Eglantine Cottage. Listening to the lively music, everyone and everything seemed gay. The three pictures, representing the story of St. Geneviève, were reflected in the brightly polished copper. Potterat's two wives seemed to smile at the company from the depths of their frames. Mi-Fou, lying full length under the sofa, stretched out a cautious head, his ears flat against his head. Carlo danced gaily round the table, and Madame Potterat and Bélisaire, sitting behind the little iron stove, beat time with heads and feet.

"That ending ought to be a little more rounded, a little softer, with a touch of melancholy in it," said the master of the ceremonies, "after the high note let out for all you're worth, well marked, swinging, magnificent, the sort of thing that grips you in the pit of the stomach. The first phrase, as it were, is solemn and slow, like church music; the second is like a march to victory. . . . Now then. . . . Wet your lips first . . . (the bottles were on the table). . . . Are you ready? At three all begin. . . . I'll count a bar first. . . . One, two, three. . . ."

Regamey, who played an instrument with an enormous

bell mouth, took the bass part, and lowed and bellowed with tremendous vigour, descending into fathomless depths, hanging on to one deep cavernous note for an eternity, his eyes dilated, his cheeks swollen, a triangle of purple veins standing out upon his forehead. With the tubes of his trombone, which he stopped to empty frequently, Bluebeard nearly swept the glasses from the table. But the leading parts were taken by Potterat and Bigarreau. Potterat, who loved all dance music, played with immense verve and vigour; he interpreted the meaning of the composer (which was fairly obvious, it must be confessed), with sympathy and feeling, letting fall lightly the shower of chromatic notes; at times his cornet seemed almost to laugh. As for Bigarreau, when his turn came to take the lead, his anxiety to do his part worthily was great. It was really very funny to see this big fat man, with his broad red face, scarlet cheeks, and fiercely waxed moustache, pursing up a tiny little mouth in order to draw from his absurd little flute the piercing sounds which soared above the deeper notes of the trombone, the final note losing itself, organ-like, in the ceiling.

Then silence reigned while the four performers, each with his nose buried in a glass, awaited the verdict of the audience.

"That's jolly fine," murmured Bélisaire at last.

"There's one little bit there that always makes me want to cry," added Madame Potterat. "What a lovely thing! What is the name of it? . . ."

"The Last Rose."

"Who is the composer?"

"Poschammer. . . . Pity he should be a Frenchman and not a Swiss. All the same, he's a fellow who knows his trade."

Then each of the performers was complimented in turn; Regamey, perhaps, a little less than the others,

because he was one of those modest retiring men who are only praised after they are dead.

When the concert was over and the instruments put back in their cases in a corner of the room, Mi-Fou doubtfully emerged from his retreat.

"Now there's a real good judge for you. . . . If you play a false note he closes his eyes. . . . When you are playing particularly fine passages, he purrs like anything. . . . How many people there are of whom one couldn't say as much. I tell you it is very rare to find anyone who really feels good music. . . . When I was in the Police, I used to have to go pretty often to the band concerts, in the service of public order, you understand. . . . My word, what a performance! Well, you could call it music if you liked, but beyond the fact that the violin bows went up and down at the same time, and that they all finished together, there was mighty little music about it. Nothing but sharps, and flats, and naturals, and worrying discords. . . . Frogs and magpies would be more musical. . . . Say what you will, that is the music of neurasthenics, of the dissipated and decadent. Music that is popular doesn't trouble itself with all these twiddles and twistings. . . . In music, as in everything else, the people's word is law. Now we Swiss, we know where we are; when we like a thing we say so; when we are annoyed, we show it; when we are thirsty we drink. . . . But these people who fly about day and night in motor-cars, who live all the time amidst tinsel and gilding, who lie abed late in the morning, and gad about till midnight, what sort of music do you think they would be capable of appreciating? . . . The kind of music a monkey would like. . . . Oh no, to my mind there is nothing sweeter than Bélisaire's ocarina. Go and get it, Bélisaire, and play us the 'Pretty Little Boat Girl.'"

Very soon Bélisaire's thin fingers were wandering up



and down his little terracotta instrument, while his goat-like profile lit up with pleasure. He seemed like a faun trying to charm with his music some sportive nymph. The others accompanied him with voice and gesture:

“Pretty little boat maiden,  
Leave your boat awhile. . . .”

“Ah, that’s the sort of music that reaches the heart,” said Bigarreau.

Eleven o’clock! They all said good-night, and for a few moments a pathway of rosy light streamed out from the open door across the carpet of snow.



## CHAPTER II

AT eight years old, Carlo was a self-confident young man, with critical eyes and a pert little nose, greatly absorbed in the manufacture of paper aeroplanes. As he dug, Potterat noticed the occupation of his son and heir, and said to Bélisaire:

“Nowadays, the boys think of nothing but inventions. . . . What do you think that young rascal said to me yesterday? ‘When I’m grown up I’m going to be an aviator. I’ll take you to Berne on my aeroplane for a thousand francs.’ . . . Go in an aeroplane, indeed! I’d a deal rather go on a merry-go-round. It’s astonishing to me how different boys are now, from what they were in my young days. And it’s only human beings who change like that. Mi-Fou’s forefathers, even as far back as the one that climbed into Noah’s ark, looked exactly the same, and had the same tastes. It’s only we who are so tormented by the devil.”

School accounted for six hours of Carlo’s day, but the moment he was free, as Bélisaire said, ‘he drove them all crazy.’ He certainly was a mischievous boy; he respected nothing and no one, delighted in imitating the groans, the hobbling steps, and the weird ways and gestures of the old man. If Bélisaire climbed into the loft over the shed, Carlo invariably took away the ladder; he hid the watering-pots, the hay-forks, etc., behind the laurels, and great was his joy if he succeeded in producing a stream of unparliamentary language from the old man’s toothless mouth. . . . Occasionally, too, there

were sounds of combat . . . the two mothers ran to the scene. . . . Uncle Carlo was thrashing Nephew Louis. . . . And once, when a Russian Baroness was being escorted round the garden, the young scamp frankly asked her: "Madame, why do you put flour on your face?" After she had gone, his father boxed his ears and shut him up in the cellar to punish him, and then, out of breath, sitting on the chintz-covered sofa, he let himself go.

"I'll tell you what it is," he grumbled to his wife, "that boy simply laughs at us. His one idea is to get on ahead . . . he looks on us as slow-coaches, old-fashioned lumber, quite out of date. . . . The conceit of the shrimp! With a son like that, we shan't starve, at any rate, in our old age."

"Well, the world is moving on. You wouldn't have him left behind, would you? And each generation is different from the last in many ways, don't you think so?"

Potterat was silent. He was thinking that kidney beans, green peas, etc., always produced others like themselves.

"Well, if only it were a change for the better, I shouldn't so much mind," he grudgingly admitted.

But to his mind, the century was all wrong: its architects, its contractors, loudly proclaimed the fact. All round Eglantine Cottage, long, rigidly straight avenues were being opened up, the old walls were coming down, the old trees were being levelled to the ground; they were talking of widening the quay by the Lake, and even of converting the old cemetery into building ground.

New shops were opening everywhere. And on Sundays, motor-cars raced along the roads, God knows whence or whither, linked to each other by thick clouds of dust, and emitting unearthly hoots and bellowings like those of some tortured animal.

"A lot of idiots!" muttered Potterat, "and those avenues . . . and now these flats. . . ."

A high building, half hidden by the pine-trees, had for some little time past obscured the view of the town spires. From a tennis court surrounded by high trellis work, balls were continually flying over and falling amongst Potterat's cabbages and carrots. Then tall youths in white flannels would appear and scale the fence. From a corner Bélisaire, too timid to tackle these smart young foreigners, would mutter and grumble.

But at last Potterat lost his temper, irritated by the careless unconcern and lack of politeness of these sportsmen, and one day, as a young Englishman with immense feet returned from an unsuccessful hunt after a ball, Potterat came out on him from a side path.

"Good-day, Monsieur! . . . Now I want to explain to you that these vegetables represent quite a lot of work, and time, and patience, and money too. Now do you think that trampling over them with a steam roller like yourself is going to improve my chances of a good harvest? . . . It's people of your sort who make life impossible. . . . And then, too, the rudeness. . . . What would you say if I kept chucking carrots and turnips over into your tennis court, and then coming and interrupting your game to pick them up? . . . No, let everyone keep to his own ground. . . . I don't want to be disagreeable, you know, I'm only explaining my point of view. . . . On the other hand, I'm not unreasonable. . . . Let's meet each other in the matter. . . . Tell your companions they can come here once a year, in the early spring, for instance, and you can get all your balls at once. . . . But to keep on climbing over my fence at intervals all the time won't do, you know. The rights of property are sacred here. . . . So I'll be much obliged if you will just kindly take yourself off!"

The young Englishman smiled at Potterat. Something in the pleasant face and Pickwickian paunch of his interlocutor evidently appealed to him. He took himself off, as he had been requested to do. And thenceforth, when a ball found its way into the vegetables, Potterat, a true sportsman, threw it back to the tennis court. Sometimes only, when he was in a protesting mood against all this encroaching civilization, and had a spade in his hand, he would dig a hole and bury the offending object with energetic completeness, muttering to himself as he did so:

"Half the time, when I send back their balls, they don't even trouble themselves to say 'thank you.' I'm not going to slave myself to death to oblige underbred people like that. . . . Good idea! I'll bury every third one I find. They'll help to manure the ground."

Meanwhile the encroachments of the town on the country tended to attach Potterat more closely than ever to his little corner. He made himself a centre of resistance, a citadel, as it were, against the enemy, a last stronghold of the receding country.

"The small town, that's all right. But the little town aping a city I can't stand at any price. . . ."

So Potterat, to fortify his resolution, walked about his domain with a proud nonchalance. He would talk to his fowls sometimes:

"How do you like your cock? . . . Is he nice to you? . . . Is he polite? . . . I hope you appreciate him. He is the most beautiful cock for twenty miles round: a pure-bred Brahma. . . . Just look at those beautiful feather trousers which reach almost down to his heels. . . . Yes, old boy, you cost me ten shillings. You look very dignified and severe, and I expect you have to be so to keep order amongst your flock. . . . Your very crow sounds peremptory: there's no hesitation about



it, no going back on the note, no breaking and ending up on a high note like a hen's. No, it is clear and strong . . . no trifling with it. . . . Ah, well, there will be no stew-pot for you. When you die, in a green old age, I shall bury you at the foot of the laurel-trees. There are some animals that we must treat like Christians. . . ."

"Oughtn't you to buy him some more hens?" asked Bélisaire.

"No, no; fifteen are quite enough for him. If there are too many of them, some of them will try to shirk laying. . . ."

Wiping his face with his sleeve, Bélisaire acknowledged the justice of this remark. Some indistinct words issued from the tangles of his whitish-brown beard, which reminded one of a frosted bush and of thatch.

"Those tomatoes are doing well," he said. "They're beginning to turn red already. Schmid's are still quite green. . . . Good thing too!" The old man shared his master's dislike of Schmid, the enemy of all imagination and fancy, the perfect type of the silent miser.

Madame Potterat worked hard, kept her house spotless, did her cooking with brilliance and success, and when her work was done, she made and trimmed hats for herself, sitting in the deep window seat. New hats were her one luxury.

"When I was in the trade," she would explain, "the fashions changed in the spring, and again in the autumn. But nowadays they change every three weeks almost. One is ridiculously out-of-date in no time."

Her husband poised a hat on the tips of his fingers and regarded it in silence for a moment:

"I don't know whether fashion ought to be reasonable, or reason fashionable. But certainly it should be one or the other, I should think. Heads are round, yet they put triangular hats on them. And these sugar-loaf



things now, they're all right for idiots, perhaps, but not for a sensible woman like you. . . ."

"Oh, get along, David! You wouldn't like to see your wife looking dowdy, and everyone laughing at her, would you? . . ."

Some friends, 'dressed all in their best,' came to ask Madame Potterat if she was coming to a regatta that was being held. Why not? It was exquisite June weather. Everybody wanted to be out of doors. In their smart white frocks, the little Mottaz girls held themselves very straight.

"Are we going to the regatta? How jolly!" cried Carlo.

Sitting on his bench in the shadow of the trellis-work, Potterat was dozing.

"Aren't you coming too? Do come along," called the party to him. "We are all going to the fête."

"To the fête? Oh, it's too hot. And besides, I'm not dressed."

Between his half-closed eyelids he watched them going off, Carlo in a sailor suit, with a man-o'-war cap on which was the name 'Majestic' in gold letters; the post-man's daughters, got up like ballet girls; the older women, all sails set, with beflowered and beplumed hats.

"Off you go!" said Potterat to himself. "For the young ones it's something new and exciting, but for you older people it's simply silly playing the hoyden like that. . . . It's all very well for a girl to have a good time and amuse herself from eighteen to twenty-five, but after that she ought to settle down. . . . At your age"—he apostrophized his absent wife and her companions—"narrow skirts, and frills, and furbelows, are no longer becoming. You have to lace in a bit too much, and the more you lace in, the more you bulge out somewhere else. . . ." And Potterat dozed off again, the murmur of the fountain mingling with his dreams. Presently, awakened by the noise of two ducks quarrelling, he

looked out over the country he loved so much: the peaceful communion of the mountains, the Lake, the sky, and of the trees laden with their golden fruit, the warm, happy, summer silence. . . . Potterat hummed to himself a song learnt at school, in praise of his beloved country. And presently he betook himself, as he did every Sunday afternoon, to the old cemetery, the principal path of which commanded a view of the fields and meadows sloping down to the Lake edge. The key of the enclosure had been given into his charge—a needless precaution indeed, since no one had the slightest inclination to climb the wall, or break through the worm-eaten fence. The casual crowd left this abode of ancient grief to the blackbirds, the lizards, to Potterat, to the joy of summer. A wilderness of flowers overspread the whole place. Potterat wandered about paternally, protectingly, with his hands clasped behind his back, amongst the graves of fishermen, washer-women, and other humble folk who lay side by side there, under the climbing roses which had gone back to the wild parent stock, the perfume-laden summer air, the humming of bees and gnats. . . . Breaking in on the peaceful silence, the sounds of the distant fête came up the hillside.

“The dead sleep, the living drink and dance,” mused Potterat aloud. “What a strange thing life is!”

Presently he stopped before a little grave and tombstone under a cypress tree; wistaria climbed over it, and bees clustered round the gay blue blossoms. ‘Florence Smith, aged eighteen years,’ he read.

“An English girl. . . . Extraordinary idea to come so far from one’s own country to die. . . .” Potterat mused awhile, in company with the crickets and grasshoppers, upon the sad romance revealed by the little stone, until the music of a gay waltz, borne upward on the breeze, brought him back to his habitual joyous love of life.

"Eighteen years old! . . . It ought to be forbidden to die at that age." . . .

Potterat continued his leisurely ramble homewards, noticing, as he went along, the state of his neighbours' gardens. As he was passing Schmid's garden, a slight noise made him look over the hedge. Schmid was gathering strawberries, and Louise was busy picking peas.

"You'd better take care!" he called out to them teasingly. "'Work done on Sunday brings bad luck on Monday!' you know."

Bélisaire was playing his ocarina. The fowls sprawled full-length in the hot sun; the Brahma cock alone stood upright, with his head on one side, sending a defiant crow up to the larks.

"Don't be so jealous!" said his master to him. "I don't like jealous people. There are some animals made for singing, and some made to crow in a poultry-yard. Everyone to his trade. . . ."

Then he went to his favourite seat under the vine-trellis. Sunbeams reflected from the basin of the fountain chased each other over the front of the house, and up to the tiled roof, from which the little round window kept watch over the country-side.

"Potterat, my friend," said he to himself, "you don't know how lucky you are; you will never realize it. . . . The swallows for tenants, the cabbages for neighbours, the Lake in front of you . . . no gossiping and cackling, no quarrels. . . . Are they any happier in Paradise? . . . Very likely not as happy, for they can't smoke a pipe there. . . ."

Although Potterat did not rush to every fête, there were some, nevertheless, that he seldom missed. As he said to his crony Bluebeard:

"I don't care to gad about to everything that's going, like some people, who rush off to some fête or other

every Sunday, tire themselves out, swallow a lot of dust, and then wonder why they feel so washed-out and done-up on the Monday morning. No, fêtes are like thunderstorms, a few real good ones are necessary, but not too many. . . . And besides, I like to know what I'm celebrating, and with whom. . . . When I go out for the day, I like to go with decent sensible people, that one knows all about from the day they were born, their occupation, their ways and habits, their little faults even, the circumstances of their lives, how many children they have, and all that. . . . Now, what I like best of all is the yearly excursion of the Choral Society and the Band. These societies aim at recreation of the best kind. . . . What can you have better than singing and music to cheer you up, to banish care and worry, to lift one's soul up to the heights, as a member of the State Council said the other day in his speech, and stir the heart and the conscience? I am looking forward like a school-boy to this excursion to Bouveret on the 10th July, and especially this year, when the ladies have embroidered a beautiful new flag for the Society. . . . They have asked me to make a speech of thanks for it after the presentation. . . . I feel as nervous about it as I did when, as Superintendent of the Police, I had to give the military salute to the King of England at the railway station. . . . A speech! Well, there are speeches and speeches. . . . Anybody can say a few platitudes if he is called upon, but to make a good speech, to get home to people's feelings, to bring in neat little allusions, and poetic fancies, and to finish up with a fine peroration: that isn't so easy, you know. . . ."

"When I get up to make a speech," said Bluebeard, "I say, 'Here's to you,' and then I'm stumped. . . . But with you it is different. You've got the 'gift of the gab': you can talk splendidly."

Potterat drew himself up, secretly gratified:



"Oh well, I don't know about splendidly. . . but I can talk. . . . That at any rate is something."

For the next week or so, Potterat, in the retirement of the shed, to an audience of watering-pots, rakes, forks, and a scythe like a big note of interrogation, rehearsed flowery speeches, in which allusions to Winkelried, the mountains, the flag, their brave soldiers who were ready to guard the frontiers, jostled each other in tumultuous enthusiasm. Then in the cold light of morning all his glowing periods vanished like smoke, and he would say:

"Bélisaire, you'll have to make this speech for me. . . ."

Bélisaire would laugh.

"Oh, I'm famous at speeches—without words! All my words are inside me. . . ."

"Well, I don't know that those are not the best kind of speeches after all."

In the evenings, too, flute, cornet, trombone, bassoon, made the whole neighbourhood lively with quick steps, waltzes, popular patriotic melodies, enveloping in waves of martial sound the silent trees, until an hour when only the silvery bell of an occasional frog would usually be heard.

At last the great day arrived. The dawn was just stealing in, over a smart frock spread out ready to put on, on frilled petticoats freshly starched, on a rose-trimmed hat, when Potterat awoke and stretched himself.

"Good Heavens! . . . Get up, get up! . . . It's late! . . . We shall miss the boat! . . ."

The whole household was astir at once. They whistled and sang as they dressed. Potterat, clean-shaven and smart, was finishing the packing of the luncheon basket when a shout from Carlo startled him:

"Uncle's rabbit. . . . The big red one. . . . In the cabbages. . . ."

This rabbit of Schmid's, a portly creature, em-

boldened by repeated maternities, was an old offender, and the worst of her depredations was that she ate only the hearts of the cabbages. . . . Already Bélisaire was hard in pursuit, and Potterat followed on his heels, guided in the chase by the little white nose of the creature, constantly in a different place. In his bounds and plungings after the rabbit Potterat crushed more cabbages than the enemy had ever destroyed. . . . A yell of triumph, and Bélisaire emerged, holding the rabbit by the ears, and a few minutes later, Potterat was brandishing the animal in the face of his son-in-law, whose crafty eyes sparkled.

"D——n the beast! Can't you put a muzzle on it? . . . I don't grow cabbages to feed your menagerie of rabbits. . . . If you don't want to quarrel with me you'll have to look after them a little better. I warn you, the very next time I catch that creature in my vegetables, I'll fetch her a blow on the back of the head that will send her to kingdom come to eat carrots there, if she can find any."

Schmid, without uttering a word, took delivery of his full-paunched rabbit.

"Still in your slippers! . . ." exclaimed Madame Potterat on the return of the hunter.

"Well, I can't let these rabbits have it all their own way in the garden."

Out of breath he bent down to lace up his boots. But fat men have difficulties of which the thin know nothing. . . . They can't see beyond the top buttons of their waistcoats, for instance. . . . His fingers fumbled helplessly, the lace knotted itself up, he pulled here and there . . . the lace broke with a little decisive click.

"Damn! . . . Rotten stuff! It's easy to tell what country that comes from. . . . Might as well try to lace one's boots with a strand of bindweed."

At last, however, fully dressed from top to toe, Potterat

opened the door to join the others, when a sudden idea stopped him:

"My glass! . . . Where is my field-glass? . . ."

"Oh, come along, do. . . . Bigarreau and his wife started ten minutes ago. . . ."

"I don't care a hang for Bigarreau or his wife. . . . I want my field-glass. . . ."

"Do come."

"Where is it?"

"Come along. . . ."

"No, I won't. I won't go at all if you keep on much longer. . . . What's the good of having a field-glass if I can't have it with me when I want it? . . . I'm not going without it . . . not if it takes me all day to find it. . . ."

Carlo whispered a word to Bélisaire, who slipped out, climbed the ladder into the stable loft, and found the glass close to the round window from which there was such a glorious view. Mi-Fou took advantage of the confusion to insert her head into a basket and to seize and drag out a slice of ham, with which she hastily retreated under a cupboard. There was a fresh uproar. . . .

"Oh, hang it all! . . . Here, Mi-Fou! . . . Good Heavens, I expect he has eaten up all the sausages!

. . . We shan't have anything to eat the whole blessed day! . . . The devil! . . . Between cats and rabbits I'm nearly crazy. . . . Nice sort of house this is. . . . Here, let's get away . . . before something else happens. Off we go!"

They had to run for the boat. Madame Potterat uttered little plaintive cries as she ran, her smart hat falling over one ear; Carlo groaned under the weight of the basket of food; Potterat, puffing and panting, his cornet held in the crook of his arm, the bag of bottles on his back, uttered broken-winded sentences from time to time, in a dismal voice:

"Oh, it's no use. . . . We'll never do it. . . . There goes my chance of making the speech. . . ."

However, as they turned a corner, they saw, away below, a procession filing along, the band at its head, the flagstaff towering above the heads of the crowd.

"Ah, there they are! Good luck! . . . We shall catch them up. . . ."

With a final effort of tired muscles, the Potterats gained on and joined the rest of the party. Triumphant, his face streaming with perspiration, swelling out his chest with a mighty inhalation, Potterat raised his cornet and joined in with the band in the very middle of a bar. . . . 'That's better. . . . When Potterat comes along, he wakes them all up.' . . . Potterat guessed that something of this sort was being said, by the smiles of the women, and the festive looks on every side. He expanded. He felt immensely pleased with himself. His joyous face shone again in the sunlight, the points of his moustache rose golden against the blue background.

At length the passengers had embarked; the usual crowd of clerks, shopboys, shopgirls, Italians with their accordions, bankers, tourists, shoemakers, and last, but not least, the Society of the 'Brise du Lac,' much enhanced by the size of their instruments. The captain, bronzed and smiling, watched them from the bridge.

"Put your hat on straight, for goodness' sake," said Potterat to his wife. "Naturally, if you *will* wear a plume of that size, it's bound to capsize the whole cargo."

The gangway was just being hauled up when a yell of 'Stop!' was heard, and Visinand, the clarionette player of the band, was seen running madly along the quay, his instrument case tightly clutched under a thin arm. Cheered by the crowd, sworn at by the pilot, he leaped over the widening space between the landing stage and



the boat, revealing as he did so shins clad in rose-coloured cotton socks.

For the moment Potterat, as well as his friends, felt themselves overwhelmed by this crowd of pale-faced clerks, pert girls with low-necked blouses, haughtily silent English tourists, munching Germans. But very soon he rose to the dignity of his green and white cockade, and felt quite indifferent to these unsympathetic, bored, distant, or vociferous people. 'This cockade,' he mused, 'is as good as a uniform. It is a sort of reference. It says to these dissipated youths, these globe-trotters: "This ribbon with the Cantonal colours, shows that we are a Society, that we are known, that we have a stake in the country, we have families, we pay our taxes. . . . We are now going to dine and drink each other's healths together. . . . That is a usual thing amongst neighbours and friends who have lived in the same place all their lives and hope to die there eventually, who have the same tastes and the same interests, who are, in a word, Vaudois. . . . If we are countryfolk, and look it, we are proud of it . . . it's a jolly fine country!"'

Quite set up again in his own esteem, Potterat allowed his eyes to roam, with a proprietary look, over the mountains which formed the background to this medley of human beings. Then as Sigrist, the conductor of the band, gave the signal, he raised the instrument to his lips, taking a long breath.

"Ready? . . . 'L'Exilé.' . . . A little slow at first, afterwards more agitated."

Visinand played with heart and soul. This piece might have been specially composed for his clarionet, which seemed to weep, to sigh, to sob, in turns. The trombone, the bugles, the cornets, seemed only an accompaniment to him. . . . The sweet melancholy of the air insinuated itself into all hearts. On the bank the walls, the poplars,

the houses, and higher up, the rounded slopes bristling with vines, glided past without a sound, as if painted on a canvas, stretched between earth and heaven, which unrolled itself silently as they went. Presently they drew towards the bank. . . . "Lutry! . . ."

"Come along with us," shouted Potterat to the man on the landing stage who caught the rope; soon they were off again.

"Look here, let's play 'Le Gai Chasseur,' " suggested Potterat to Sigrist.

That air was not suited to the clarionet, so Visinand subsided into limp obscurity, like a songless linnet, whilst Potterat and Bigarreau, with their great brass instruments booming, reminded one of those big frogs gorged with flies that one may see basking in the sun on a water-lily leaf.

"Aren't they enjoying themselves, those two old boys?" . . . whispered one of Wertenschlag's shopgirls to Bonnard's red-haired clerk.

The wives of Bigarreau, Potterat, Regamey, Peytrequin, etc., looked scornfully at these silly girls giggling behind their hands.

"Look at that one," said Madame Bigarreau, "she gets only fifty francs a month, and yet she puts on the airs of a duchess."

"Lace outside, and rags underneath," added Madame Peytrequin.

"Ah well, they're young," murmured Madame Potterat indulgently.

The sea-gulls skimmed the surface of the waves, the white houses glittered in the shimmering air. The very boat funnel, letting off steam, seemed to be panting with holiday joyousness. An Italian played some chords on his accordion, whereupon one of the shopgirls, drawing her transparent scarf from her shoulders, began to pirouette with her young man. On the inspiration of

the moment, Potterat hummed to himself a line or two from one of his favourite songs,

“ Beautiful Lake, so vast, so blue:  
May we die, as we’ve lived, in sight of you. . . .”

The rest took it up, and grave as judges, in order to get out the deep notes properly, the men buried their chins in their collars, and the women directed the high notes towards heaven. A foreigner wearing a green hat with a cock’s feather opened his Baedeker with a bored air. How bright and gay everything looked in the sunlight. Presently they approached the bank again. Houses and spires became clearly visible, a loop in a winding road, and—the glory of the country—the vineyards, intersected with their low walls, hung over the blue mirror of the Lake. With proudly swelling heart, Potterat sent his song up to the mountain-tops, as if addressing himself to them. And something of their grandeur entered into his heart.

“ Montreux ! ” . . . Here all their fellow-passengers got off, the clerks and shop assistants, the befrilled maidens, the Italians with their accordions, the silent English folk, the German young men with their feathered hats and their green suits.

Off again.

“ Thank goodness ! . . . They’re off to the Rochers de Naye, or to the Château de Chillon, or to the Kursaal to drink tea and eat little cakes and think themselves very grand and fashionable. . . . Now we are by ourselves, and can enjoy ourselves,” . . . and Potterat levelled his glass as he spoke. “ My goodness, what a crowd of people on the Dent du Midi ! . . . There’s one lady looking at herself in a little pocket-mirror . . . and a man is eating some ham. . . .”

“ Oh, let me see. Let me see,” . . . cried Carlo.  
“ Oh, father, it’s not true. There’s nobody there. . . .”

"You little goose. . . ."

While Regamey and Visinand were discussing the heights of the various peaks, Potterat approached some of the ladies, and began explaining to them how the boat engines worked:

"It looks very complicated, all these wheels and cranks and things, turning, and jostling each other, going backwards and forwards, and all these shafts and turbines. . . . But it's really very simple when you understand it all. . . . They boil the water . . . that produces steam, as you know. This steam forces itself through the pipes, enters the machine by that corner and works the whole thing. . . . Pushed by the steam, it has to turn. If it didn't it would be much more astonishing. . . . Steam is force, force is movement, movement is . . . you understand. . . . All this power is directed on the wheels which simply have to go. And then the boat goes forward. . . ."

One lady timidly asked a question:

"But why do these pistons work contrary to one another? . . ."

"Well, you see, some of them turn one way, and some of them the other way. . . . In order to work properly, you have to have them going opposite ways . . . opposition makes resistance, and resistance is the secret of power. . . . Not to mention that . . . you quite understand. . . ."

At the Pension Brochet, the terrace overflowed with diners. But the landlord had reserved for the Lausanne Choral Society a table on the grass sumptuously spread. The surroundings were delightful; a green lawn sloping to the water's edge, where the waves rippled and broke on a little strand, with a pleasant murmur of water rippling over the white stones. Some trees threw a grateful shade over them, whilst in the waving branches a thousand flickering shafts of sunlight played.



"Ah, this is something like," said Regamey, as he sat down.

"Yes, indeed!" . . . replied his neighbour. "And we're going to have two dinners. First, a hot dinner: soup, fish, vegetables . . . then, when we've had enough of the hot things, we'll open the baskets and have the rest; then the cakes . . . and on the top of it all a cigar, and a bottle in front of every man. . . ."

Gazing at the exquisite beauty of the Lake, everyone was silent for a moment after they were seated. Drawing a long breath, Potterat broke the silence:

"Beautiful! . . . Glorious! . . . And in addition, we're all hungry, we're all thirsty, and we've got everything we want. . . ."

After the soup, in an appreciative silence, the golden fish, fried to a turn, and sprinkled with salt, was placed on the table. The moment was epic; everyone, though in excellent spirits, was too occupied to talk. A few short words, between two mouthfuls.

"These little fishes are excellent . . . so nutty in flavour."

"Nutty! . . . Why do you want to bring in nuts? . . . Fish is good enough for me. . . ."

Presently the baskets were opened simultaneously. From hers Madame Potterat brought out a pie with a delicious brown crust.

"What beautiful pastry you make, madame," said someone. "I had an aunt once down at Forel who used to make pastry like that for weddings and such-like. . . ."

The little Bigarreus were suddenly slapped by their mother; Madame Potterat discovered that Carlo had crushed a strawberry on the dress of his next-door neighbour . . . but the glasses went round again, and pardon was general. With his head on his hand, Vidoudez gazed sentimentally at Mademoiselle Logeon, the typist.

"You're very quiet, Potterat," said one of his friends.

"Oh, presently, I'll talk. When I have to speak in public, I first eat a good deal, I drink a glass or two to loosen the springs as it were. . . . Then comes the moment when the brain begins to work, shoot out sparks, light up the ideas, and then is the moment to plant one's fists on the table, get up on one's feet, look round at the people, and talk. . . . That's the great secret of making speeches."

Presently the trumpet sounded a fanfare. A group of young girls, wearing green sashes across their white frocks, surrounded the new flag, and unfurled it to the breeze. The orator emptied his glass and refilled it. Then he rose.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of this Society, dear fellow-citizens. I have been asked to give the toast of our beloved country, and to ask you to join with me in drinking to those clever and diligent fingers which have embroidered for us this beautiful banner, the unrolling of which is the object of this fête.

"Our country, Switzerland. . . . Only the voice of a poet could do it justice. With the finger of its mountains it touches the clouds. Alone of all nations it possesses snows which one may really describe as eternal. Its spirit is heard in the peaceful tinklings of our sheepbells in the mountains. . . . In its national institutions it has caught the essence of true democracy, as can easily be shown. In Switzerland three languages and some patois are spoken. Three races dwell in perfect harmony within her borders, bound together by the ties of mutual respect and mutual rights. Some of them have square heads, and others, God bless them! have round heads. . . . Little quarrels and differences we have, certainly, and sometimes feeling runs high, but the moment the red flag with the white cross is hoisted, the ranks close up, and the Swiss Confederation is the cement which

unites all hearts in one. . . . How beautiful its pastures, how prosperous and happy its people. . . . And how we regret having to die, because it means leaving Switzerland, and we don't know whether they have anything as good up there. . . . However, 'There's no rose without a thorn,' and I believe it to be my duty to point out one of these at any rate. We who have been set apart by Nature herself with tremendous mountain barriers, we are invaded by the world of luxury. Our edelweiss is sold at the corners of the streets. Our streets and public places reek of musk and patchouli, and other artificial scents. We have become a sort of turnstile, where strangers are always passing through. Only this morning on the boat on our way here you saw our little Vaudoise girls trying to ape Parisiennes. And yet where could you find anything better than our Vaudoise women, tall, strong, rosy-cheeked, regular double dahlias of women. . . ."

Potterat glanced round at the ladies present with a complimentary look, emptied his glass, which Bigarreau filled again immediately, and went on, having gained the hearts as well as the ears of the women:

"Now why should we imitate these foreigners? You ask these extraordinary specimens we get from Valparaiso and other countries round about the Mississippi what they think of us? Nothing! They don't think of us at all. Then since they are absolutely unconscious of our existence, why should we take any notice of them? . . . Everyone has his own nationality, his own physiognomy, his own way of talking, his own ideas about food. The man or woman who tries to break away from these simply makes himself ridiculous, absurd, and his friends think him a fool. . . . That's all. . . . Now what are we going to do about it? . . . Well, I say, let us keep our own ways, wear our own national dress, preserve our own accent, our national dishes,

drink our own wine, grow our own cabbages. . . . Let us make our own excursions, climb our own mountains, sing our own beautiful national songs, and enjoy our country in our own way. We belong to our country; we are part of it. Nature puts her own mark on us; on our lakes and our mountains, whether they be called Fichtrehorn or Diablerets, we acquire that something which marks us throughout life as a native of that part. You can prove it for yourselves. The Geneva people are thinner than we are: that's their mark. The Berne people are fairer than we are: that's their mark. The people of Tessin are more bronzed: that's their mark. . . . And although our country is small as regards size, it is great in the friendship which binds us all to one another. . . . And how is that friendship shown better than in Societies such as the one now sitting round this table in the warmest good-fellowship? When we are playing, we feel the bond of patriotism. When we are performing an exquisite cantata, our hearts swell with pride. . . . I lift my glass then in honour of our Choral Society, the Brise du Lac, in honour of the Canton de Vaud, in honour of our old Switzerland. . . . Long may it live, and we with it. . . ."

Here they gave the Cantonal salute three times over. Regamey was quite overcome with emotion. Then Potterat's broad face lit up like a window with the sun on it, as the young girls advanced and handed the new flag to Bigarreau. Held up high by his brawny arms it unfolded itself to the gentle breeze, displayed all its colours, and its inscription in gold letters. It seemed to smile at the Lake. . . . Carried away in the excitement of the moment, Potterat took up his speech again:

"It is to the ladies that I have now the pleasure of addressing myself. In the name of the members of this Society I thank them again and again for this magnificent gift which their kind hearts have prompted them to make



for us. It will be an encouragement to us in the strenuous task we have set ourselves. . . . Think of the long evenings, through which, in secrecy and mystery, diligent and clever fingers have plied the needle, with the result which you all now see before you. . . . Henceforth we shall march behind this banner, ready to defend it to the last drop of our blood. It will rejoice our eyes. It will uphold our spirits. It will inspire us with energy and enthusiasm. And whenever we play, whenever we sing, this dear symbol will float before our memories. To the fair sex which is the ornament of all our fêtes, and the hope of all our dreams, I drain this glass to the last drop of its nectar of our countryside. . . . To the charming sex, Long life and happiness."

At the noise of the cheers that followed, the seagulls hovering over the Lake flew away. Potterat wiped his forehead, modestly disclaiming the compliments which were showered on him.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said to Logeon. "I've always been told that I had a turn for making speeches. . . ."

"Bravo, David!" said Madame Potterat.

After dinner, everyone agreed that a little rest would not be a bad idea. So they settled themselves in friendly groups, on the slopes here and there, with tree stumps, or mossy stones, by way of a cushion, the whole scene radiating that simple happiness with which woods and fields and summer sunshine envelope us, but which is never found in streets; the happy comradeship of neighbours, a little jealous of one another at times, perhaps, but always kindly; a good fellowship, warm-hearted, tender, almost romantic, on the part of Potterat, whose earnest sincerity made the feeling stronger in all of them. They gazed dreamily on the magic beauty of the scene before them: the imperceptible gliding of the swans on the bosom of the Lake, the blue of the water, the picturesque little bays along purple shores, the indefinable

graciousness and love that seemed to descend from Heaven upon this happy land, cradled their hearts and minds.

"On the day of creation," said Potterat, "we drew the first prize. . . . And we know how to appreciate it. . . ."

Presently some of the younger members of the party began dancing on the terrace of the inn, to the music of Visinand's clarionet. He sat under the shade of a big chestnut-tree. And soon, all up and down the little valley, in the shade of the trees, couples were whirling to the music. Young men and girls smiled into each other's eyes. Madame Bigarreau, clinging to her husband's arm, gazed steadily at the sky; some of the older people, even, trod a dignified measure; while Potterat, his face shining, bubbling over with happiness, dragged his wife through a series of complicated movements. He said gaily:

"Come along. . . . That's all right. . . . Fat people can always waltz better than thin ones. . . ."

Suddenly, a long peal of thunder, like the tearing of calico, followed by a loud clap, fell through the hot air. Visinand put up his clarionet, and the arms of the dancers fell. The sky was suddenly overcast, and a chilly wind sprang up from behind the forest. Hats disappeared under the skirts which were kilted up high over the petticoats. They gathered up the baskets and fled. . . .

The boat hurried over the oily waters. At Montreux, the returning crowd swarmed over the gangway; the Italians, the clerks, the shopgirls, the green-hatted fraternity, the Englishmen . . . but how different from the gay crowd of the morning! Dresses limp and clinging close to the hips, trousers sticking to the shins. . . . The very golden-haired young lady's paint was washed off, her hair was dishevelled by the wind, her hat was crooked, and its aigrette stuck out over one eye in a bedraggled point.

"Never mind! . . ." said Potterat cheerfully to her. "Better luck next time. . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. And as her cavalier giggled, Potterat added:

"Bravo! . . . It's something, anyhow, to be able to amuse fools."

The storm still growled over the Lake. Sulphur-coloured lightnings fell from a livid sky over the black water.

"This is all right," asserted Regamey. "The best excursions always finish up with a thunderstorm. . . ."

"That's true! . . ." replied Potterat, "especially for lovers. A declaration of love is always more fervent if it is made between the peals of thunder. . . . R-r-r-an! 'I adore you! . . .' R-r-r-an! . . . 'Good Heavens, how dreadful! And I love you too! . . .' R-r-r-r-an! . . . But I believe it will be fine after all by the time we get to Ouchy . . . there are the stars coming out over there. We'll go off in procession, with the band playing . . . that will make a nice wind-up to the day."

But alas, they were doomed to disappointment. The clouds closed in again thickly, hiding the stars from sight, and the rain came down in long, silver threads. On the landing stage the people fled like dead leaves before the wind, the lightning flashed on the bright instruments, the flag was rolled up, and the crowd streamed off the boat in silence. Taken by assault, the trams rung their bells frantically; the confectioner at the corner hastily closed his inundated shop, shutters banged, cats flew with lowered tails across the street, like stones from a catapult. A cornet brayed out some hoarse notes defiantly, and a voice was heard to say beseechingly:

"Do be quiet, David, you'll attract the lightning."

And David replied:

"I'm only playing the 'Cantique Suisse.' There's nothing like it for frightening away evil spirits."

### CHAPTER III

To gardeners who love their work, and care for their plants with sympathy, the gratified earth responds marvellously. At Eglantine Cottage, one had only to stretch one's hands out and pick quinces, apples, peaches, pears, tomatoes, . . . and the trellis bent under the weight of its grapes. They moved the ladder from tree to tree, spreading a sheet underneath, which was hollowed into a tunnel under the weight of ripe fruit.

"Gently. . . . Gently . . ." the master of the house would call out. "You must treat fruit decently. . . . To be worth eating, peaches should have their down on, and plums their bloom. . . ."

In spite of his wife's entreaties, Potterat, perspiring and grunting, climbed into the trees. He fought with the wasps, cautiously, for fear of reprisals, for his ripe pears, which filled the air with their sweetness. He sat prudently in the fork of a tree, and from thence he issued a flood of instructions and commands to Carlo, seated astride one of the highest branches. He made remarks too:

"Just listen to Schmid's apples falling slap on to the ground. He's spoiling them. . . . And for a man as eager to make money as he is it's rather astonishing. . . ."

"Oh, do be quiet . . ." said Madame Potterat, standing beside the baskets, in which she was laying the beautiful fruit on layers of fresh leaves.

"Why? . . . I'm in my own garden. . ." said Pot-



terat indignantly. "Glorious view one gets from up here," he went on, "I can see seven bays and two promontories. . . ."

The warm air was sweet; the fountain played in the afternoon silence. When the fruit was all gathered, they brought in the baskets and ranged the fruit on straw in the cellar. The boy who delivered the evening papers ran past, depositing the *Feuille d'Avis*, as he did so, on the window-sill.

"Let's see what news there is . . ." said Potterat. . . . "Accidents. . . . Fires. . . . H'm, nothing more than usual. *And* offers of marriage . . . as many as you like. . . . 'A middle-aged lady.' . . . 'A widow with some savings.' . . . 'A serious person, yearning for true affection.' . . . Ha! that would suit you, Bélisaire! Send along your photograph and a nice letter; that would be sure to do the trick. . . . You yearn for true affection, don't you? . . ."

Bélisaire sniggered. "Oh, they made eyes at me as long as my hair was black. Now it's white, they don't notice me any longer. . . ."

"Come now . . . you could play them some barcarolles on your ocarina. . . . And you're no chicken, you know. . . . You're getting on. . . ."

"No doubt. . . . Oh, well, I'll think about it when I get to the next world. . . ."

Meantime, Madame Potterat was walking as far as the gate with Mademoiselle Eva, a *bonne* who had come to buy vegetables.

"I hear that you are engaged to young Burnand. He's in a solicitor's office, isn't he? . . ."

"Oh, he's much better than that. . . . He's employed in a bank. We're going to take a nice little flat in town . . . one of those new ones. . . . 'Modern comfort, fitted bathroom, drawing-room,' and all that. . . . And just think, he's dead set on my learning the piano. . . ."

"Well, why not! Your fingers are supple enough. . . . And it's always nice to be able to have a little music. . . ."

"Oh, certainly it passes the time. . . . I should play waltzes. . . ."

Potterat came up to the table where Carlo was laboriously writing a composition for school, his tongue working with his hand.

"Show me what you're doing. . . . There's a good boy. Look how well he writes already. . . . Ha! I shouldn't wonder if you got a commission when you go up for your military training. . . . It's in the blood. . . . My father's uncle once spoke to Napoleon. . . ."

"In the army. . . ." interrupted Madame Potterat, while she waved a last good-bye to Eva. "Ah well, there would never be any real fighting anyhow. People are too civilized now. . . ."

"Oh, that's only outside varnish," said her husband. "I know the human heart. Pride and jealousy are getting up steam inside. . . . One day or another the varnish will crack, and then you'll see of what wickedness the world is capable still. . . ."

Madame Potterat put her arm instinctively round her boy.

"Wouldn't you like better to be an engineer? . . . or perhaps a merchant, a wholesale merchant? . . ."

But this Potterat vetoed at once.

"No, no. . . . There has never yet been a Potterat in trade. To be a grocer wouldn't appeal to us at all, would it? . . . As for being a clergyman! . . . It's a splendid profession if one wants to be poor. . . . A lawyer? . . . A tap for turning on a stream of falsehood. . . . An engineer? . . . To make bridges and tunnels in order that we may be overrun by all the foreigners and half-breeds in the world. . . . No, thanks. . . . Professor? . . . Twenty years hence, boys will

be impossible to manage. . . . No, the best thing is to have a position of organized and established authority. Where one has only to say to people 'Go!' and they go, or suffer the consequences. . . . That's the right sort of profession."

Carlo took up a position in front of his father.

"You know very well that I'm going to be an aviator. . . ."

"Just listen to that young imp!" exclaimed Potterat, though he was secretly delighted with the boy's spirit.

\* \* \* \* \*

For some time past a sly-looking man might have been seen to stop on the road opposite Eglantine Cottage, and take notes in a pocket-book. Also he appeared to be measuring distances with long strides. Potterat frowned as he watched him.

"There's Mauser! . . . What is he up to now, poking about like that? . . ."

This man Mauser, without having any very clearly defined occupation, was undoubtedly a clever man of business. He knew just when to buy a piece of ground cheaply, to group his purchases together, one bit rounding off another, then to sell the whole to some rich tradesman longing for a villa, or to build thereon one of those barracks of flats where the poor crowd and swarm together. He had a certain smart knack of catching the popular taste with novel ideas. Venice and its palaces, for instance, furnished him with some. The words 'loggia,' 'campanile,' 'pergola,' etc., fell frequently from his thick lips. As he became more prosperous, he let his whiskers grow, from the tips of his ears over his fat red cheeks; he began to wear light grey frock coats, fancy waistcoats, etc., and, with the air of a well-preserved man of the world, to frequent places where he could rub up against people richer and still more successful, even, than himself. He had an oily,

insinuating way of talking to possible victims, of adapting his conversations and opinions to those of his hearer, knowing well that often the zigzag path gets to the desired place sooner than the straight road. So, with his hands always in his pockets, a big gold chain lying across his paunch, his chin glistening, a good-humoured twinkle lurking in his eyes, and a big cigar in his mouth, which, by the way, made him speak somewhat indistinctly—it is not always desirable to speak too distinctly—he hovered round about various small proprietors, narrowing his circle and striking his claws into their property at the opportune moment. . . . Bigarreau, Burnand, Potterat, Schmid, all knew him well by sight, from having seen him a hundred times gazing at some poster plan of a block of flats, or standing under a tree, apparently admiring the scenery.

On Saturday evenings, too, he might often be met with at the barber's in the Square, buried in an evening paper, and apparently in no hurry, judging by his readiness to give up his turn, and to engage in chance conversations. In reality, he had noted Bigarreau's oaths, Burnand's reticence, Schmid's grumpiness, Potterat's romantic idealism. He knew all their characteristics. And on the slightest provocation, he would invite people to have a drink. And they would accept.

Now he had set his heart on getting this garden of Eglantine Cottage, sloping gently down to the orchards bordering on the Lake. An ideal position! He had great plans (he pronounced it 'blans'); Mottaz had sold him his ground; he had an option on that of Perret. But these would be of little use to him if he could not secure Potterat's land, "to round off the view," as he expressed it.

Leaning against a tree, to all appearance lost in reverie, Mauser was studying Potterat, as the latter went about his garden, talking to his cat, the fowls, or Bélisaire.



By the very way the big man walked about, planting his heels firmly on the ground, Mauser knew that he loved his land, and would not easily part with it. Certainly there was Carlo, at present a schoolboy in a sailor suit, but what about the future?

This vegetable patch, as it was, would not be much of a provision for this cherished son of theirs, . . . it would not go far in establishing him in life. And then there was Madame Potterat. . . . "She'd be all right!" thought Mauser. "One has only to notice her Sunday hats, and the way she cranes her neck to watch a fashionably dressed woman pass, to be pretty sure that *she* wouldn't be likely to refuse a reasonably good offer. . . ." There was only Schmid and his ground. And there wasn't much doubt but that he, with his narrow face, and close-lipped mouth, always bowed over his work, rising early, going to bed late, a sworn enemy to tobacco, and cautious before a bottle, even when the drinks were free, . . . he would close with an offer like a shot, and his wife would follow him meekly. The hardest people to dislodge are those sentimental fools who are bound to a place by ties of remembrance and affection. Pshah! silly dreamers! . . . But you can't make that sort listen to reason.

"He's up to no good, that Mauser!" Bélisaire would often mutter. "People who laugh with their eyes only are never to be trusted. . . ."

One night, towards ten o'clock, Eglantine Cottage, as usual at that hour, was wrapped in slumber. Peace lay over the garden, over the wide-winged roof. . . . Potterat was snoring loudly, lying on his back; in the stable loft, Bélisaire reposed with great dignity, his beard flowing over the coverlet; creeping with velvet feet along the gutter, Mi-Fou's thin back filled for a moment the round window, hiding the stars. . . . No one heard the stifled cries, the expiring groans which suddenly broke

the soft stillness of the night. But in the morning the bloody feathers which were found in the fowl-run, the frightened survivors perched on the topmost branches of a pear-tree, the ruffled feathers of the cock, all told their own tale.

"It's some brute of a weasel! . . ." lamented Potterat. "It has killed the big yellow one—the best layer! . . . If I catch the beast I'll drown it in boiling water! . . . Why the devil couldn't it have gone after Schmid's fowls, instead of stealing decent people's? . . . Brute! . . ."

After this, Potterat put his Brahma cock, and his best hens, into the cellar every evening, after a wild chase. And then he went back to the run, and armed with an old pistol, lay in wait, crouching in the shadow, for the marauder. Twice he let fly at the moving shadow of a branch, after which he swore largely for some minutes.

Bélisaire, on the other hand, borrowed Bigarreau's shot-gun, and betook himself to the fields. There he poked about in the undergrowth, guided by his poacher's instincts.

"You must watch near the place of the last attempt," said Potterat.

"You must attack them in their holes," asserted Bélisaire.

One evening a shot was heard, and soon after, Bélisaire appeared in the moonlight, carrying the victim over his shoulder. It was a fat young fox. Potterat hurled imprecations at the body of the thief.

"Brute! . . . Thief! . . . Highway robber! . . . Curst for all eternity! . . . Weasels or foxes, devil take them all!"

For three days after that, the animal marinated in a bath of red wine in which floated some onions and cloves. With silent satisfaction, Bélisaire, the old gourmand, presided over the cooking of his game, and made for it

a savoury sauce flavoured with marjoram and bay leaves . . . then in the evening, a few men appeared and were welcomed by Madame Potterat. Sniffing the savoury fragrance, they sat down to the table, just as Potterat appeared with his arms full of bottles. Putting them on the table he shook hands all round. Then silence reigned. . . . When Bélisaire came in, bearing a huge dish on which reposed the fox, lying on a bed of fried onions, carrots, turnips, and potatoes, and holding in its mouth a roast fowl, there were exclamations of delight. Amidst talk and laughter the meal went on. They drank Bélisaire's health, as he had been the provider of the feast.

"Now you are the hero of the feast," said Potterat, "you must give us a toast."

"Oh, I'll give you a toast, and a fine one too. . . ." Then stroking his beard meditatively, and with a far-off gaze, the gipsy love of wandering in the old man asserted itself.

"Here's to the life of the fox! . . . There's nothing finer in the whole of nature. . . . The fox lives well; he has his fill of fresh air and of life; he lives in the ground, close to the roots of things; at night he roams far and wide in search of his prey; he never grows old and white-haired; he dies while he is still full of life and vigour, without being ill. . . . But there are not only foxes with fur," Bélisaire went on, lowering his voice, "there are foxes in frock coats and top hats; . . . and these are the most to be feared. There are not only geese with feathers . . . there are geese, silly geese, with beards and moustaches. . . . I could mention some of both kinds. That Mauser, for instance, who prowls about on the quiet, poking his nose into other people's affairs; who buys up old gardens and sells them again at a big profit; who builds these high cages. . . . What is he but a fox of the worst kind? As for the geese . . .

well, there are some people sitting at this table who are thinking, perhaps, that they are exchanging their poor little places for a much better and grander run. . . . Well, let them beware, I say! For money people will often do very foolish things. . . . Money kills all simple things, memories of the past, love of one's old home, happiness, and good humour. . . . I would warn the geese just to look out! . . ."

There was a silence, then, with a mighty thump of his fist on the table, Potterat said:

"Bravo, Bélisaire! Hear, hear! You've hit the nail on the head! . . . Yes, that fox is prowling round our chicken runs. . . . This house now, I have lived here for nine years, and I am as fond of it as if I had been born here ten times over. . . . And my garden, my vegetables, my fruit trees, the fountain, well, I am very happy here, I don't want to change. . . . I tell you what, let us all agree—all of us who have ground about here, myself, Burnand, Blanc, Menétrey, Giron, Bigarreau—let us all agree to hold our land tight. . . . The first who sells is a coward and traitor to the rest. . . . The first one who betrays the cause of the country will be put in the pillory of public contempt by common consent. . . . Is it agreed? . . . Well, let's make a solemn promise here and now, in front of these bottles . . . under the eyes of our forefathers. . . ."

They all agreed enthusiastically. With tears in their eyes, the older men of the neighbourhood swore to stand by their property. They compared notes as to the date of the building of each house; they recalled those who had lived in them, and one man quoted feelingly:

"There by the spire of the village we love,  
There where our fathers are sleeping."

As they were leaving, the lamp that Madame Potterat held above her head illuminating the garden path, Bigarreau said to Potterat:



"Watch that son-in-law of yours that he doesn't begin to drive a bargain. . . . Are you and he on good terms? . . ."

"Oh, we are on as good terms as one can be with such a curmudgeon. He would sell his soul for money, I believe. . . . 'Apart from that,' as the man who had fallen from the top of a ladder on to a stone said—apart from that, he is all right."

As usual, Madame Potterat interrupted:

"David! . . . Do be quiet! . . ."

"No, I won't. . . . Why shouldn't I say what I like? I'm a free and independent citizen. . . ."

There are some days when everything seems to go badly. The soup is burnt, glass gets broken, bad temper prevails, the grey sky and general dinginess of everything depress one's spirits, and the waves lashing on the beach foretell rain. On one of these days Potterat, looking up from where he was working in a corner of the garden, saw his little son running towards him, his face streaming with blood. For a moment he was transfixed with horror, but Carlo began:

"Just look what Louis has done! . . . We were playing marbles, and he lost . . . and then he hit me in the face with a stick. . . ."

At this moment, from behind the hedge was heard the irritated voice of Louise:

"Carlo stole your marbles, did he? . . . And then kicked you twice? . . . What a wicked boy! . . ."

To crown all, Schmid's chickens and his rabbit, having managed to get through the hedge, were gaily disporting themselves in a bed of lettuces planted out that morning. Exasperated to fury, Potterat charged down upon the foe. The fowls fled madly with outstretched wings and hoarse squawks of terror, but the rabbit, cornered at the foot of a tree, was seized by the two ears, killed by one blow

on the back of its head, and flung on to a manure-heap, where it lay with its paws in the air, a poor dead heap of brown fur.

"Trying to murder my son, and destroying my vegetables! . . . There's your rabbit, you old fox," shouted Potterat furiously. "It won't have any more toothache. . . ."

Schmid, in a towering rage, thrust his head over the hedge, and with his arms raised towards heaven, his eyes glaring, his face crimson, his mouth convulsed with rage, he spat out an insulting name at Potterat, and kept on repeating it at intervals with the regularity of a machine.

"It's yourself you're talking about . . ." chaffed Potterat. "Oh, you want to have it out, do you? . . . All right, then, let's have it out once for all. . . . What sort of a neighbour do you think you are? . . . Hey? . . . A wooden face! . . . a block of ice! . . . the sulkiness of a mule! . . . And nasty tricks about everything. . . . Indeed! You want an explanation, do you? . . . Who played the fool about the fountain? Who shirked his share of keeping the fence in repair? . . . I've put up with a good deal from you, but I'm just about fed up with you and your ways. . . . Go to the devil, you and your fowls and your dead rabbit! . . . It's where you belong. . . ."

Potterat's wife held on to her husband from behind; Schmid's wife held on to him. Between them all lay the dead rabbit.

". . . Tell me to be quiet! . . ." shouted Potterat. "When gutters are full they run over. . . . I have held my tongue long enough! . . . For years I've been holding myself in. . . ."

Then, quite suddenly, the storm was over. Exhausted by its own violence, the rage of each man came to an end. Potterat still talked vaguely and loudly of putting the

matter in the hands of a lawyer, of the interest he could bring to bear in high quarters, and he threatened Schmid with fines and disgrace. . . . The other, though cowed, still spat out his insults, but at longer intervals. . . . At last both men were silent, and the wailing of the rising wind, the moaning of the Lake, resumed their sway. Rain began to fall. Both families retired indoors.

"If he had spoken another word I should have gone for him . . ." said Potterat to his wife. "He shut up just in time."

Sitting on the sofa, in the gloomy room, Potterat endured for a time his wife's reproaches, and the portraits seemed to gaze regretfully at him from the wall. At last he could stand their combined blame no longer, so he betook himself to the shed where Bélisaire was mending the handle of a tool.

"Did you hear the row?"

"Rather! . . . You could have been heard across the Lake."

"And which do you think is in the right of it? . . . The son-in-law or the father-in-law? . . . My son half-murdered; insults repeated again and again; not to mention his thieving fowls and rabbits. . . . I tell you he's just about reached the limit. . . . And now he's going to bring an action against me. . . ."

Bélisaire shook his head.

"No, no, he won't go to law. . . . Besides, if he did, when one has been treated so abominably as you have, and has passed it over so many times, you could hold your head up before the magistrates. . . . There are plenty of witnesses. . . ."

Potterat held out his big hand.

"Bélisaire, you may not have a penny to bless yourself with, but your heart's in the right place. . . . Ah, this is what happens when one's daughter marries beneath herself! . . . I ought to have made her marry a policeman,

one of ourselves. . . . It's the first language you learn that stamps you for life. You hear a child say 'Mutter !' or 'Maman !' and there you have the character at once ! . . . There's my son Ernest, the bank manager. Now that he is married to a girl from the German side we see practically nothing of him. We don't get on, she and I, somehow. She can't take a joke at all, and the least trifle upsets her. . . . Besides, it's always a pity, I think, to bring cross-strains into a family. You never can tell how much this crossing of races is going to affect the population of a country as a whole. . . . When you marry, Bélisaire, take my advice and choose a girl of your own country. I don't mean to say that there are not very decent people belonging to other countries; they're all very well in their way, but they haven't the same way of looking at things. . . ."

Bélisaire agreed with him.

It was a decided shock to Potterat when one day some workmen came to him for the key of the old cemetery. Their ribald jokes annoyed him.

"You don't mean to say it's true that they're going to build there?"

"Oh yes, it's true enough. They're going to have the new school there."

"And the trees? . . ."

"We're to cut them down."

"Well, indeed! That's a nice sort of thing to do! . . ."

"It's none of our business. We do what we're paid to do. . . ."

So the noise of the axes, and the cracking of a tree before it finally collapses, were to be heard daily at Eglantine Cottage. Presently, the curtain of foliage removed, a huddled crowd of roofs, the upper windows of a hotel, a high blank wall, stood out nakedly before the eyes of its inmates.



"What fools there are in this world!" thought Potterat. "Well, anyhow, they won't get me to budge."

During a mild November, he busied himself in trenching a piece of ground that he intended to plant in the spring. He dug in impartially snail-shells and colchicums; the setting sun bathed the Lake in a red glow; some swans were flying heavily close to the water. As he worked, Potterat meditated.

"Well! . . . they won't succeed in turning me out of my little corner here—my little house, where one seems to be in communion with the water, the sky, the earth. In imagination one can sail on the Lake; sometimes one could easily imagine oneself flying over it like the gulls. . . . I've quarrelled with the son-in-law, certainly, but that's rather a blessing than otherwise . . . apart from that, we're perfectly happy here. . . ."

On his way back to the house, Potterat was feeling in particularly good spirits; the short grass strewn with dead leaves rustled under his feet; the little brook trickled pleasantly along its gravelly bed. The house, lit up by the last rays of the sun, shone out from a setting of red and yellow autumn foliage. The moment he opened the door, his wife said:

"Have you heard the news, David? Schmid has sold his house and garden."

The announcement struck Potterat like a blast of cold air, as he took off his hat.

"Françoise! . . . You're not joking, are you? . . . Do you mean to say that the curmudgeon has sold? . . . Schmid? . . . Well! . . . But perhaps it's all for the best. . . . He was a disgrace to the neighbourhood. . . . Well, I'm more determined than ever, now, that I won't go out of here alive."

"Bravo!" applauded Bélisaire.

"But how did you hear about this, seeing that we're not on speaking terms with them?"

" Louise told me. . . . Twenty-three francs the square metre Mauser is giving them for it. . . . It's quite a fortune. . . . There they are, almost gentlefolk, able to live on their money. . . . But you know what Justin is. . . . He never thinks he has enough. . . . Instead of retiring and living comfortably, he has gone and rented a farm at Vidy."

" Oh, he's a regular money-grubber, that fellow. . . . In the next world he'll manage somehow to make money . . . he'll be Satan's doorkeeper! . . . But what's Mauser going to do with the ground?"

" Nobody knows."

" If he builds a villa it won't be quite so bad, but if he's going to put up one of those rabbit-warrens of flats of his, we'll have to moulder in the shade of it for the rest of our days, I suppose. . . . We'll have mushrooms growing under our beds. . . . Damnation! . . . It's killing that beastly rabbit of his that has brought this upon us. . . . These glum, silent people can be spiteful, can't they? . . . And to think that he's a son-in-law of mine! . . . If I could have my life over again, I would never have any children. Up to the time they marry they are all very well; after that it's nothing but trouble and vexation and quarrelling, and all the rest of it."

Now and then Potterat would go into the old cemetery during the dinner-hour, to see how things were going there. The workmen ate their dinner, sitting on a wall, in the midst of tree-trunks, planks, bones, and grinning skulls peering through the holes.

" You ought to be ashamed! . . . People that you have known, that you used to pass the time of day with, even have drunk with! . . . To root them up like that from their last sleep! . . ."

The workmen's reply was always the same:

" It's all in the day's work. We're paid to do it. . . . And after all, better turn the dead out than the living. . . ."

"Unfortunately, the one doesn't prevent the other. . . . Mauser looks after the living. . . ."

"Mauser? . . . That's the man who's going to build a block of twenty-four flats just beside your place, isn't it? . . ."

"Only twenty-four! . . . Why not thirty? . . . Oh, I thought as much! . . . Pity we can't go back to the time when people ran naked in the woods. . . . Nowadays, with these speculations in building land and all that, one has nothing but worry and trouble and exasperation at every turn. . . . They persecute the living, and they dig up the dead. Above ground or below one has no peace. . . ."

"Well, why not sell, like the rest?" . . .

"Sell? . . . You might as well ask a man to sell his wife and family as to sell his ground. . . . For the matter of that, a man very often has nothing but disappointment with his family, whereas with his land he has only to sow and reap his harvest. . . . And what about the trees he has planted? . . . And the flowers he has grown? . . . And his favourite seat under his trees? . . . Sell? . . ."

Potterat shook his head and went on sadly:

"I say! You've dug up the grave of the poor little English girl! . . . Only eighteen, she was. . . . What a shame! . . . And now you're coming to Mojeon's grave, Adrian's father, you know. He died at eighty-four. One of the finest old fellows I ever knew. . . . Oh, I knew them all. . . . I never thought I should see their bones again like this. . . . My God! What hellish doings! . . ."

And Potterat walked home, the tears in his eyes.

At the beginning of February, some men invaded Schmid's deserted garden, and began the work of devastation. Trees were uprooted, the little apricot-tree sawn

through, the hedge broken down to make a passage way for huge waggons of building material; deep ruts filled with mud were to be seen everywhere, planks were thrown down on the boxwood borders; a mean little shanty was run up where bags of cement were stacked. . . . In the evenings the desecrated garden was over-run by boys who came to cut switches, to steal the parsley, etc., just beginning to grow again; at night the place was depressing beyond words; in the daytime the continual noise of heavy carts, of the shouts of their drivers, of swearing, of whip-cracking, as the obstinate horses planted their four feet wide apart and refused to budge, of stones rolling down like an avalanche when the carts were tilted up. Already the pickaxes were busy on the twin cottage; its roof-tiles were off, and the garret could be seen through the bare rafters. Doors and windows had been taken away. Bricks and stones fell to the ground in clouds of dust and plaster, chimney-flues were outlined in black on the dividing wall. . . . The house-breakers' blows resounded intolerably through the Potterats' house, and the cups danced on their shelves.

"There's Mauser and the architect," said Bélisaire. "They're looking at our garden. . . . Don't they look like bears in their big fur coats? . . ."

"Of course. They try to look like the wild beasts they are as much as they can. . . . And to think that one is given a reward for killing foxes and otters, yet for killing one of these brutes one would get thirty years' penal servitude. . . . Good Lord! the world is a funny place! . . ."

It was a very trying time. Madame Potterat, racked with headache, gave up attempting to cope with the dust which came in at every crevice.

"This noise will drive me crazy. . . . Even at night I can still hear the hammering. . . . Look here, David, if one has a good chance why not take advantage of it?"



. . . Just think ! A five-story block of flats scarcely half a dozen yards away ! . . . Think of the noise, the gloominess, the damp. . . . We shall all get rheumatism ; the boy will become anæmic for want of air and light ; and you won't have much pleasure in cultivating your garden under the eyes of a hundred and fifty people. . . . Oh no, it's absolutely impossible. . . . This place was pretty, one of the prettiest places I've ever seen, and we've been very happy here . . . but it's done for now. . . . What is the good of being obstinate ? . . . Far better to sell while we have the chance. . . .”

Crossly, roughly, Potterat answered :

“ All right ! . . . That's enough ! . . . You can sell it the day after I'm buried !”

One morning, when Potterat had gone to have a friendly chat and grumble with Bigarreau, Mauser came over and leant familiarly on the hedge near which Madame Potterat was hanging out some clothes. He made a remark or two about the weather, then little by little he worked round gradually to the subject he wanted to talk about.

“ I'm really distressed at having to build so near your garden. . . . But business is business. . . . Why don't you hurry up and sell your ground ? . . . Take advantage of the opportunity. . . . That's the whole secret of success in life, to see and seize opportunities. . . . Yours is a very pretty little house, but it's very old. . . . Besides, you have to think of your boy's future. He's such a fine, clever-looking boy. . . . But to educate him as he ought to be educated costs a lot. You want to have a nest-egg in the bank. . . . And now's your chance of getting that. . . . Your son-in-law has profited by the opportunity, as you see . . . twenty-three francs a metre. . . . There you are ! Twenty-three francs put on each square metre of your ground here would take some time to pick up, hey ? . . . That's a fery goot price, hein ? . . .”

When Madame Potterat repeated this conversation to her husband he shrugged his shoulders in silence.

"All right! All right! . . . It's no use talking about it. . . ."

A few days after, Bigarreau came into Potterat's garden with an air of excitement and worry.

"I say, Potterat, what would you do in my place? Mauser has been at my wife. He wants to buy that piece of our ground down by the Lake, between you and the Lake, you know. . . . My wife wants me to sell. . . . And that bit of ground is all sand and gravel . . . nothing will grow there. . . ."

"Old man, do you remember what Bélisaire said? . . . The fox is going his rounds. . . . He evidently thinks us ready to be exploited. . . . We old people who have lived here so long, that have taken root here, are we to let ourselves be turned out for money? . . . Quietly and by degrees bits of the country here and there are being annexed. . . . If it goes on much longer, this invasion of the country and cultivated land by towns and buildings, we shall soon be a nation only in the history books. . . . By-and-by they'll have a wall of houses round the Lake and these foreigners and their scullions will look out of the windows at us behind the wall. . . . Well, then they may 'ring down the curtain' on Switzerland. We shall retire into the background of the country, we shall pine away in the shade, we shall grow mushrooms in the hollows of our cheeks. . . . We shall be so musty and worm-eaten that we shall fall to pieces. . . . Oh, there, I won't talk any more about it. . . . Besides, what can I say to you? . . . If the women want a thing, they'll have it. . . ."

Bigarreau went off rubbing his ear.

But the person most upset by all these events was Bélisaire. These blows of pick and hammer, the clouds of white dust which lay thick on his vegetable beds, all

these men who watched his going and coming, all these jumbled roofs exposed to view by the cutting down of the trees, were things which disgusted and depressed him beyond measure. . . . And then, too, this plaster dust made one thirsty. If a man has to swallow dust all day long, to breathe it, you can't wonder that his throat gets dry. . . . Anyhow, Bélisaire took to drink again, to coming in late at nights, singing some mournful dirge in a voice very much out of tune, and stumbling up the wooden staircase, grumbling as he went:

"Oh yes, I'm fed up with it all. . . . One of these fine days I'll take to the road again with my pack on my back. . . . Better to die in the woods than to live in this plaster-dust. . . . I'll be my own master. . . . I tell you I'm going to die decently, properly . . . free and proud . . . proud and free. . . . Hi! you people up there, let's have a bit of a song. . . . 'Up, up, the sun is high!' . . ."

A door opened and Potterat appeared, clad in a voluminous nightshirt.

"Now then, Bélisaire. Stop that nonsense about sunrise. . . . It's half-past twelve at night. . . . It's all very well your getting a little bit screwed; in the circumstances one wouldn't say a word, if only a man came home quietly. . . . There now! You can sing to-morrow . . . go to bed now. . . ."

"Who are you talking to? . . . I'm a free man, ain't I? . . . No human being has the right to tell another human being to go to bed. . . ."

"That's all right! . . . That's all right! . . . Now, go to bed. . . ."

"Oh, I don't mind going to bed. . . . I'll go to bed all right. . . . But don't you think you're going to put old Bélisaire in a cage. . . . He was born in a ditch, and he'll die behind a hedge. . . . Good-night. . . ."

"Good-night, Bélisaire."

Potterat went back to bed more upset by this little incident than he cared to admit. For quite a quarter of an hour he remained awake, stretched on his back, his hands clasped behind his head, feverish, worried, turning over a hundred plans in his mind.

"Aren't you going to sleep, David?"

"Yes, yes, I'm going to sleep."

"You're letting all this worry you far too much. . . ."

"I'd just like to have that Mauser here beside me now! . . . I'd smother him like a shot. . . ."

"Oh, go to sleep."

"I won't if I don't want to."

"Don't be silly, dear. Go to sleep."

"Who are you talking to? . . ."

In the morning he was irritable and suspicious. He leaned out of a window to see what was being done in the twin house—the wallpapers in strips, a hole in the ceiling, the staircase gone all but three steps which remained hanging in space, and the shutters lying in a heap on the curb of the well, the window-panes broken or cracked, the old oak door, the bolts of which had guarded the house from thieves for centuries, perhaps, thrown down anyhow on the ground. . . . About five yards from the hedge overlooking Potterat's garden throughout its whole length, some poles taller than the mast of a ship marked the place of the future building.

One bleak windy evening in March, when a strong north-easter was blowing, Bélisaire came back from the public-house in such a state that he did not attempt to enter the house, but passed the night in the garden, stretched on a bench behind the hazel-trees. Towards daybreak he woke and climbed to his little room, but did not come down to breakfast. . . . Towards nine o'clock, Potterat began to be uneasy, and went up to his room.

"What's the matter, Bélisaire?"



"Nothing. . . ."

His beard pointing up to the ceiling, his face thin and drawn, the old man was gazing fixedly at the lime-tree branch which the wind sent swaying across the little round window.

"Is it true that you slept outside last night? . . . In that north-easter? It's enough to give you double pneumonia! . . . That's a nice sort of thing to do! . . . Look here, Bélisaire, you're letting all this upset you too much. We'll have a place to ourselves again soon, you'll see. Buck up, old man. . . . In the meantime, with that face of yours, I think I'd better go for a doctor. . . ."

Bélisaire still gazed fixedly at the swaying branches.

By the time the doctor, a tall fair man with a square chin, arrived, Bélisaire was delirious, raving and laughing at the visions he saw. This lasted two days. Then another couple of days of silence, broken only by the quick breathing growing ever shorter, more whistling. And presently there lay upon that bed only the poor thin form, scarcely raising the clothes, only a sharp white face with a straggling beard, with wide-open eyes, blue as the distant sky, gazing still at the lime-tree branch. Those eyes Potterat reverently and tenderly closed.

"Good-bye, Bélisaire, old boy!" said he, with tears in his voice.

And to his wife, who came in just then, with Carlo clinging to her skirts, he added:

"Just to think that for sixty-eight years he tramped the roads, and now he is at rest! . . ."

Carlo, eager to know what a dead man looked like, more curious than afraid as yet, stood on tiptoe to see better.

"Yes," his father said, "look well at that face. That's the face of an honest man . . . perhaps you'll never see another so honest in the whole of your career. . . . Look at it well. . . . That's what Bélisaire was, an honest man. . . ."

Soon afterwards, Potterat was sitting, twisting his hat round and round, in Pastor Bernier's study.

"And this good man, did he go to any church while he was with you? . . . Do you know what his religious views were? . . ."

"To tell you the truth, sir, I don't think he believed in any one religion more than another. . . . He didn't seem to belong to any creed, neither in opinions nor in going to church. . . . As far as I could gather, he had been, as a young boy, with some people who professed very strict principles, but who had no religion in their hearts, and ill-treated him. That gave him a dislike to all established forms of religion. . . . He loved the open roads, the moon, the hedges, the woods, . . . a regular tramp he was. Now and then, perhaps, he would do a little begging, or even pinch a fowl, or some fruit. . . . But no real harm in him. . . . That's the sort of man he was. . . . When I was in the Police, we used to run him in regularly every autumn when the weather turned cold, keep him in for the winter, and let him out again in the spring. . . . I'll go bail, sir, that you bury every day religious people who wouldn't be a patch on him. . . . He was a real good man in his way. . . . As gentle as a lamb. . . . Never a thought of vengeance on those who had treated him so badly. . . . The worst fault he had was a tendency to drink more than was good for him, in the hours of slackness that we all go through, but even when he was drunk, he was quiet and well-behaved, never made a row, or threw things about. . . . And he was not one of those who drink for days at a stretch. Altogether, he was one of the very best. . . . Honest and good at heart, but a perfect fool in business matters. . . . There, that's the certificate I'd sign for him with both hands. . . ."

"And he lived with you? . . ."

"Naturally! . . . He was old, quite grey, rheu-

maticky, always running at the eyes. . . . I have a garden, with just enough work for two people. . . . To make a long story short, I adopted him one evening that I found him in my garden."

"Was he married?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. . . . He couldn't bear women. . . . He was all for the open air. . . . Oh, he was quite a sort of hermit! . . . not a ghost of a notion about money-making; he didn't understand people, and few people understood him; he only wanted sun and fresh air. . . . And yet people would have come from far and near to hear him play his ocarina, if only they had known about it. He was a real musician, sir. . . . As I often used to say, how many people there are who lead a double life, have illegitimate children all over the place, the kind of men who wear smart overcoats, who have their safes full of money and shares, who upset whole neighbourhoods, and embitter honest folk by surrounding their bits of ground with high blocks of flats like the Tower of Babel, and when they die, are given grand funerals; yet Bélisaire will be miles ahead of them in the kingdom of Heaven. . . ."

"Bélisaire, his name was, you say? . . ."

"Yes, sir. His real name was Noverraz, I believe. But the name he always went by was Bélisaire. . . . He never liked to be called anything else. . . . So you'll know, sir, the sort of thing that will be suitable for his burial. . . . Not exactly a sermon, but just some verses from the Bible, two or three words, friendly and simple, a bit of a prayer. . . ."

"I know, I know! . . . Well, I have enjoyed our little talk very much, Monsieur Potterat. You are a great student of human nature, I see."

"Well, sir, I ought to know something about it. . . . I have spent thirty years of my life dealing with hopeless cases. . . . I know them through and through, the

worst and the best of them. . . . I know their little ways from beginning to end. . . . I had to be pretty wide awake and sharp to be up to all their dodges. . . . And then one hears things . . . and one remembers . . . and puts two and two together. . . .”

As soon as he reached home, Potterat wrote to Delessert, his old sergeant:

“ DEAR FRIEND,

“ Bélisaire is dead. He is to be buried on Thursday at three o’clock. It occurred to me that as he has been so many times in our hands, it might be a little mark of attention if two or three of the police in uniform came to the funeral. This would please him, and it will please me. Try your best to arrange it. In haste.

“ Yours, etc.,

“ DAVID POTTERAT.”

At the appointed day and hour, Potterat, Carlo, Bigarreau, Regamey, Giron, and some other friends, and four members of the police force in full parade uniform, helmets, epaulettes, and white gloves, etc., accompanied Bélisaire’s coffin, simply garlanded with primroses, to the cemetery. At the graveside were waiting eight members of the Band, frequent visitors to Eglantine Cottage, standing in the shade of a cypress with their instruments. And they had brought Potterat’s cornet. The pastor blessed the grave, into which a pale, wintry sun shone; then they lowered into the bosom of his Mother Earth this son of hers who had for so many years wandered under the spring showers, who had loved the fields, slept under the starry sky, known hunger and cold, but also the music of running water, and the delights of summer evenings. . . . Then, at a sign from the leader, all the instruments were raised, and the solemn notes of the Funeral March rang out over the silent graves, lingering on the last note as if loath to leave off.



. . . The four police officers saluted. The ceremony was over. . . .

"Well now, there he's fixed up! . . ." said Potterat. "He ought to be content. . . . I've seen dozens of grand funerals, with flags, and crowns, and wreaths, and a crowd of mourners, most of them talking and laughing as usual before they had got out of the cemetery. . . . but I tell you I've never seen one more beautiful than this of Bélisaire's. . . . Just a prayer. . . . and the trumpets. . . . But what made it so fine was that everyone who was there brought sincerity with him. . . ."

Potterat now worked alone in his garden. After an hour or two of the ceaseless sound of hammering and digging, he came, exasperated and grumbling, into the house.

"Well, what do you expect? . . . We can't do anything. . . ." said his wife. "We knew it would be like this. . . ."

"Well, 'what can't be cured, can be endured,' I suppose. . . ."

"If you like. . . . By-and-by there will be two hundred people or so at the windows, watching our every movement. . . ."

"Well, let them stare. . . . We can just spit at them. . . ."

Mi-Fou purred contentedly, to the accompaniment of the singing kettle. From the distance came a regular 'Boom! . . . Boom! . . . Boom! . . .'

"Wow! . . . this row will drive me crazy! . . ."

"Oh, don't talk like that, David. . . . It's very annoying, certainly, but things might be worse. Let us move. We shall find a place that you will like. . . . with a nice garden. . . ."

"Move? . . . Ah, now you're showing your hand. . . . Never! . . . Do you hear? . . . Never! . . ."

and Potterat banged his great fist upon the table. Mi-Fou woke up with a frightened mew.

"And he used to be so happy!" thought Madame Potterat sadly. "Never a black look. . . . Always heartening me up. What will be the end of all this? . . . Certainly we have had some very happy times here, and in summer it was delightful watching the boats go past, . . . and we have a lovely garden. . . . But in winter, when the Lake is stormy, it is gloomy enough for anything. . . ."

Leaning her elbows on the table, Madame Potterat saw in imagination the lively streets of the town, the brightly lit shops, the fine new houses with their gay balconies. . . . An orchestra was playing lively airs in the Square. . . . Then she spoke again:

"I don't think it's right to be so dreadfully obstinate. . . . What sort of life will it be for us when these flats are built? . . . And we ought to think of Carlo too. His education will cost a lot. . . . And if we don't take this chance we shall very likely never have another. . . . 'A chance lost never returns!' . . ."

"Carlo! . . . Don't talk to me about that little wretch. He gets on my nerves! . . ." and Potterat flung out to the garden in a rage.

There the disembowelled house, hideous as an open wound, stared him in the face, with its tattered wallpapers. Loud oaths and cracking of whips broke out close by . . . a huge dray, filled with stones, was stuck in a rut, and the waggon creaked and groaned as the smoking horses, trembling with fatigue, strained at their collars. . . . Suddenly there was a sharp crack, and the plum-tree lay on the ground, broken short off at the roots. . . ."

"No! . . . No! . . . I can't stand this sort of thing! . . ." muttered Potterat to himself. ". . . Mauser offers ten thousand francs for the house, and fifty thousand for the garden; with my pension, we should be quite well

off. . . . We could take a trip into Italy . . . and have some good dinners. . . .”

Suddenly, he pulled himself up sharply, indignant with that lower unworthy self which plays tricks with the best of us at times.

“Are you mad, Potterat?” he asked himself. “Would you sell yourself for money? . . . How can you even think of such a dirty trick, with your two feet standing on your own ground? . . .” and he went away, bitterly disappointed with himself.

With April came cold rains, alternating with bright sunshine, turning the waves of the Lake to dancing gold. From the inside of his shed, through the square of the open door, Potterat could see only the unspoilt half of this wonderful site: trees, delightful little shady paths, the placid Lake, and always the fairylike beauty of the mountains, and the promontories. . . . So much beauty in a country tends perhaps to a certain indolence and lethargy in life. One is so happy there. In old-world villages this is clearly seen. At four o'clock in the morning everybody's chimney is smoking: at ten o'clock at night every household is asleep. . . .

“Oh, decidedly it's a mistake to get too fond of anything in life. . . . Damn it all!” thought Potterat.

Presently, the shoots began to peep through the hard crust of the earth, pierced it, and burst into a thousand leaves. . . . Then came the raking of the fields and lawns; tendrils and rotten stalks, fallen leaves, dead branches, were all gathered into heaps. The sky in a playful mood sent down a few last snowflakes. . . . A match strikes; the heap sends out smoke as some straw catches here and there. Fanned by the wind, the flame mounts higher, rears itself above the smoke, sends out sparks and thick clouds of smoke. . . . Another armful, Carlo! . . . The twigs crackle like castanets; the whole neighbourhood smells the spring weed-burning, all eyes are red, all hearts are light, thinking of the coming

summer. Perched on the topmost branch of a hazel-tree, a blackbird is wondering if he has forgotten how to sing. . . . Not a bit of it! . . . That went beautifully! . . . Exquisite summer days! . . . But Potterat grew more and more depressed, and finally, he decided to talk things over with his friends at the wine-shop at Etraz. One evening then, over their mugs of golden liquor, he unburdened his heart. Regamey, Sergeant Delessert, Vidoudez, looked at each other.

"Well, you *have* luck!" said Delessert. "We can just manage to scrape along; we think ourselves lucky if we can make both ends meet. . . . Half the time we are five hundred francs or so short at the end of the year. . . ."

Vidoudez looked with disgust at his hands, stained, as usual, with red ink.

"We have to count every halfpenny, mend every hole, look sharp after our discounts. . . . What can we say? . . . Poor people like us cannot advise moneyed people like you. . . ."

Potterat felt inclined to laugh. They actually envied him! This filled him with pride. He began, however, to say:

"Our grandfathers were simpler in their ways than we are. . . ."

"Oh yes, but the old folks are dead. . . . You can't compare their time with the present. . . . Do you want to make your son a peasant or a city man? that's the whole question. . . . If a peasant, then sell and buy a farm somewhere about Penthalez. . . . If a city man, then he must be trained to it quite young. . . . But you can't do both at once. It's one or the other if you want him to succeed."

Presently they turned out into the lively streets; crowds were pouring out from the cinematograph.

"For a man with plenty of money, there is nothing finer than town life, but for poor men the country is best."



Thoughtfully Potterat wended his way home. The moon showered sparks of light upon the waves, and the lights of the little villages dotted over the plain were like so many winking eyes.

"There's no doubt about it. . . . I must either go right into the country or give in. . . . One can't go on being a peasant in the middle of the town. It's one thing or the other. . . . The worst of it is that in life the head pulls you one way, and the heart another. . . . Always a struggle between them. . . . Always suffering. . . . One cannot struggle alone against the whole of civilization. . . . If it were not for the boy. . . ."

Potterat told his wife about the jealousy shown by his friends.

"They were quite green with envy, Françoise."

"Well, they see it all the more clearly. . . . Do you want Carlo to be a milkman, or a woodcutter, or a farm-hand? It's simply selfishness on your part. . . . If you live in town you must do as townspeople do. . . . To bring a boy up on a farm means that he becomes shy and stupid, his boots are always muddy, he doesn't know how to express himself, he has not the manners of polite society. . . . And you must remember that you yourself only took to the land after you had retired."

"Me! . . . I was always a peasant at heart. The Vaudois are all peasants by origin. All the big Government officials, even those at the top, have that simple countrified air, the tanned skin, the sturdy frame, the big hands. . . . Besides, that's not the point. You are all leagued against me. . . . Bélisaire did the best thing possible when he took himself off out of it all. . . . I ought to have been born twenty-five years sooner, and to have died ten years ago. . . ."

"What an old croaker you are, David."

"That's all I am fit for, I suppose."

Once more he began to sleep badly. The silvery trickle of the fountain in its basin got on his nerves

intolerably, and as he turned and turned again on his creaking bed he groaned aloud.

Then Burnand sold his land. The six tall poplars which marked the boundary between them at the lower end of his garden fell one after another with loud crashes. Next door they were digging the foundations of the new building, and laying down drain-pipes in cement.

"The whole place is ruined. . . ."

"Of course it is. . . . If you don't sell now, it won't be worth a hundred francs in ten years' time."

"What do I care?"

Carlo interrupted:

"Father, let us go into a place where there are other boys. Here, I have no one to play with. . . . It's very lonely. . . ."

"So much the better, it will teach you self-reliance. . . ."

"You *are* obstinate, David," said his wife. "What a life of it we are going to have! . . . You think only of your own pleasure. . . ."

"Now look here!" and Potterat banged his fist on the table, while his eyes blazed with anger. "Don't let me hear another word about this. . . . We shall die in the shadow of these buildings, every one of us. I'm master, after all, so now let's have no more of it. . . ."

The meal was dismal after this, naturally. The oaths of the carters who were eating their dinners sitting under a tree close by took the place of their customary conversation. Madame Potterat wiped her eyes from time to time. Potterat stole a glance at her. She was crying. . . . Oh, these women! . . . He got up and went out. No one had really eaten anything. . . . In his anger he walked straight on, scarcely knowing where he was going, looking fiercely at the big gay shop-windows, at the smart motors, etc., reserving his sympathy for the little shabby shops where some old man or woman waited patiently for a stray customer.

"Oh, shut up your shop, go upstairs to your garret,

and put an end to yourself," Potterat imagined himself saying to them. "People like you are wanted no longer. . . . Nowadays, everything is glitter and tinsel, lace petticoats, powdered faces, parading the streets, toadying, and trying to climb, putting on airs. . . . Simple honest folk are idiots nowadays. . . . Ah, it's no use struggling—trying to swim against the tide. . . . I can't go on quarrelling from morning to night with my wife, with the boy, with the devil. . . . They are all for the town. Then let them have it, for all I care! . . . On the other hand, to take a new garden at my age, to lay it out according to my taste, to plant trees, and all that. . . . Why, it would take years. . . . No, it's out of the question. . . . But to stay on where we are is impossible. I see that. Before long it will be no better than a cellar. . . . Hang it all, we'll have to move, for the boy's sake! . . . Well, the good old times are over. . . . Bélisaire dead, Mi-Fou on the brink of the grave, a wife who is a good wife, certainly, but who has all sorts of ideas in her head, a boy who thinks of nothing but speed, . . . all my friends round about selling their ground to be built over. . . . Potterat, you've got to take the plunge, and you may as well get it over. Make up your mind to a third-floor flat. . . ."

It would seem as if Fate ordained certain meetings. As Potterat approached his home again, he almost ran into Mauser, lurking, as usual, in a corner from which he could see all that was going on.

"Good-day!" said Potterat gruffly.

Mauser at once grasped the fact that this usually jovial man was suffering the pangs of wounded pride, and that he must touch the open wound with a light hand, but that the hour had come to strike.

"Good-day, Monsieur Potterat," he replied in his wheedling voice, and then he added slyly: "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to talk to you about business to-day. You've decided not to sell your pretty little

place, and you're quite right. I'm not going to bother you any more. . . . Every man knows his own business best, doesn't he? . . . People have their habits, their memories; some people care for these things more almost than for their children. . . . But, as I say, let every man do as he thinks best, and then, if things go wrong, well, he has only himself to blame. . . . There is a right time for everything, and all other times are wrong. . . ."

Potterat was grateful to Mauser for his tact. Casually, to all appearance, he began on the important subject.

"Well," he said carelessly, "and supposing I did eventually want to sell the place—say in another three or four years or so—how much would you offer me for it?"

"Look here, I'm willing to meet everyone if I can. I gave your son-in-law twenty-three francs a metre for his ground: I'll give you twenty-four for yours. . . . That is, naturally, if you like to sell at once. We may all be dead three or four years hence. . . . And even if we were alive, the place might very likely not be worth anything to me by that time. I like to get my ground and put up my flats all at the same time, on a big scale."

"Twenty-five francs, you say?"

"Twenty-four."

"Twenty-four. And you gave twenty-three, you say, to Schmid?"

"That is so. I'm offering you twenty-four, Monsieur Potterat, but I wouldn't give that to anyone else."

"And for the house? . . ."

"I'll give you ten thousand. The house is worth nothing in itself to me, you know, only the ground on which it stands. That's for the title-deeds."

"And you would pay ready money?"

"Ready money when you're ready," and Mauser laughed at the little stock joke with which he favoured all his clients.

"Damn it all! . . . It is not for myself; it's for my



wife, and the boy. . . . All right. We'll call it a bargain."

"Well then, to-morrow, at ten o'clock, at Lawyer Berthod's. Will that suit you?"

"Ten o'clock? Yes, that will suit me very well. If I'm going to make a fool of myself I may as well do it at ten o'clock as at eleven. . . ."

"Ha, ha! Goot! . . . Goot! . . ."

"Oh, I can make as many jokes of that kind as you like. It's easy enough if you have a quick wit, and a ready tongue. . . . We can't all be business men."

With this little stab, Potterat went off home. In the kitchen he found his wife grinding coffee with a dignified air. He sank into a chair. Then, quite coolly, he said:

"I'm sick of seeing people snivelling all round me. You can cheer up and order the band. I've sold the place to Mauser for twenty-four. One more than Schmid."

"What?" . . . (How her eyes danced!) "Do you really mean it, David? You've sold it? . . ."

To hide his emotion, Potterat drew his little son over to him.

"You see how much I must love you, my boy, to play this dirty trick on my dear old garden for your sake."

Madame Potterat put in hastily:

"Of course it's for the boy's sake. . . . I'm just as fond of this place as you are. . . ."

"All right! All right! Shut up! Don't let's talk any more about it! When people sell themselves, body and soul, it's no use harking back. When things are done, they're done, as far as I'm concerned . . . I strike them out of the orders of the day."

"And you'll see, David, we shall be able to find another garden as nice as this one. . . ."

"No. I don't want another garden. Real love comes only once in a lifetime. . . ."

## CHAPTER IV

"OH, do what you like! Only stay in this neighbourhood; that's all I ask. As long as you get something round about here, I don't care where we go, . . . second-floor, third-floor, ground-floor, or under the tiles, . . . it's all the same to me. A flat is a flat."

"You know very well that it's not of myself I'm thinking. . . . But Carlo will be at college next year. His companions will be boys whose people are of some standing. . . . I should like him to be able to invite them to his home, and to receive them properly. . . . First impressions are everything, you know, in life. . . . Oh, we must have a decent flat with a hall, a good dining-room, a pretty drawing-room. . . ."

"Have it as you like. Men are more intelligent, but women are sharper."

". . . And you will be out a good deal . . . with your fishing, your societies, and all that. . . . You'll soon get used to things."

"I'll have to. . . . One can get used to a prison, even. . . . What I shall miss most are my fowls, . . . and my beautiful white rose-tree, which bloomed from May to October, . . . and the old plum-tree, with three kinds of plums grafted on it, so that we had yellow plums in July, red plums in August, and purple plums in September. To think of all that being destroyed! . . . Oh, that Mauser! . . . He ought to have his neck wrung! . . ."

"Why couldn't you rent a piece of ground? . . ."

"No. . . . If I'm to be a gentleman, I'll be a gentle-

man. Since we are going to join the ranks of the aristocracy, let us act accordingly. . . . No, no! . . . I love this garden too well to be able to begin all over again with another. . . . Besides, what good would a garden such as you suggest be to me? To have any good of a garden you want to be able to open your door, and be right in it. . . . To have to go out to it, to unlock the gate of it, and lock it up again on coming away, to have to put broken bottles on all the walls to keep out thieves. . . . No, no! . . . If a man can't have his supper in shirt-sleeves, and smoke his pipe directly after, sitting on a bench under a tree, without leaving his own place, it's not the same thing at all. . . . Then too, I'm getting stouter. . . . Stooping brings all the blood to my head. I've had to sit down, more than once, on the verge of apoplexy. . . . If I took another garden, I should want Bélisaire again, and he's dead and gone. . . . There! Rent your flat as soon as you like. . . . I'll come along. . . ."

"And how long are you going to sulk like this?"

"I, sulking? . . . Oh, don't you worry. I'm not such a fool as not to be able to adapt myself to circumstances."

Incapable of any sort of work in the garden he was so soon to lose, Potterat sat down not far from the chicken-run. The ducks were splashing gaily in their pond; the hens, cackling loudly, left the nests where they had just laid large round eggs; the turkey-cock did his goose-step up and down, shaking out his red wattles. What birds! What flowers! What Spring gladness! . . ."

"Poor David!" said Madame Potterat to herself. "He feels it so terribly."

One evening she came back radiant.

"I've found the very thing for us."

Potterat was presently conducted to an avenue which

had not long been made. The trees, planted recently, were fading behind their little palisades, which still smelt of varnish. They stopped before a new block of flats, five stories high, and entered a spacious hall, the stained-glass windows of which lit up a frieze, on which were repeated, with monotonous regularity, three trees, a pond, and two greenish-white swans. In a prominent place, twelve letter-boxes, numbered from left to right, awaited the missives destined for twelve families.

"Which is our number?" asked Potterat.

"Six."

"All right! Here goes for Number Six!"

The concierge ran on ahead to open the door, and they entered the flat, the windows of which opened on one side into a central court; on the other, on a field which was for sale.

"You see there is quite a good view. . . . Oh, it's a charming flat. . . . The wallpapers are all different, every ceiling has an ornament like this in the middle, of ears of corn and grapes. . . . It is the work of an Italian artist. . . . And these beautiful parquet floors, and the balcony has electric light. . . . All sorts of up-to-date comfort, eh? . . ."

"And where are we to put the hay?" interrupted Potterat slily.

"Monsieur is from the country? . . ." inquired the concierge.

"Oh, I lived in the country at one time. Now I'm a man about town."

Madame Potterat broke forth into more explanations:

"These flats, all on the same level, are so very convenient. . . . You see what a nice bright little kitchen it is. . . . And there is a buttery-hatch too. . . . That is the bath-room. . . ."

"I'll have to get thinner before I can get into that bath and out again. . . ."



" . . . And this is to be our bedroom, and this Carlo's, and that will be a spare room. . . . Here is the drawing-room, isn't it lovely? That handsome glazed wall-paper, that corner bay, the oak doors, and this nice long wall for our looking-glass and pictures. . . . You must have that corner to sit and read the paper in. . . ."

"Capital! Good idea! . . . But I mustn't forget always to run and put on my best suit, and my white kid gloves before I come into this drawing-room. . . . I shall be like a Polar bear in a boudoir. . . . But let's be in the fashion. . . . Let's have receptions, and balls, and garden-parties, like the rest of the fashionable world. . . ."

Bigarreau having bought all Potterat's fowls, Potterat took them to him, two at a time, in a covered basket, to the accompaniment of squeakings, and squawkings, and cluckings, until, one evening, there was silence in the poultry yard. This solitude and silence so affected Potterat that he felt obliged to pull himself up sternly.

"This is how one makes, little by little, a cemetery of one's heart. People and animals that one has known, die . . . others change . . . one changes oneself. . . . A thing that one thought settled for life comes to an end. . . . It is memory that upsets one so. Regret for the things that crumble away, for that which is silent, for those who are dead, that's what takes the heart out of a man. . . . Now then, pull yourself together, man! The dead are dead . . . the living are alive. . . . Be a philosopher. Don't allow yourself to sink into neurasthenia. That doesn't suit fat people. By Jove, no! . . . Far better to laugh and be jolly than to go about with a long face. . . . You've been Potterat for sixty years . . . don't change now. . . ."

After this, when his wife dwelt on the past, he cut her short.

"That'll do, that'll do! It's silly to look back. . . . We've buried the past . . . and put a tombstone on it. Let's get away from it now. We've still got the vineyards, the sunshine, the Lake, slippers, and a few other little comforts. . . . Let's be thankful for those."

"Ah, that's my merry David and his fun come back again!"

"He had never gone away, my dear. . . . It was smouldering there all the time under the ashes."

The removal began. The smaller things were taken first, and for a time they were neither at home in one place nor the other. The portrait of Potterat's first wife, leaning up against a tree, seemed to be calling the Lake to witness to her neglect, for was not the portrait of 'the other' already in place? . . . The heavier furniture followed, chairs, tables, sofas, cupboards, piled up before the shed; the grandfather's clock-case, lying on the grass, looked like a coffin. The beds were taken down, and strange feet trampled the flowers in the borders; backs bent under heavy burdens.

At length, everything being gone, Potterat made a last round of the empty rooms where his footsteps echoed. . . . Closed windows, branches peeping in through the uncurtained panes . . . presently, when the shutters were closed, it would be quite dark. . . . All the pleasant hours of homely tenderness and intimacy rose before his mind, and little scenes glided like shadows along the empty walls. . . . Here stood Carlo's cradle, there the coffin of poor Bélisaire . . . the bed stood here, a sofa there. . . . And here they used to eat, and sleep, and wake to the twittering of the swallows. . . . They used to wrangle and be reconciled again, as in all homes. . . . He used to go down those cellar steps to fetch his bottle of wine. . . . He used to play his cornet here. . . . "Go away, traitor!" the walls seemed to cry out at him. "You have sold us. . . . Go! Leave us to the dark,

alone with the mice, the spiders, and the one ray of light that creeps in through the hole in the shutter. . . . Go! . . ."

Moved to the bottom of his heart, Potterat took off his hat and said aloud as if in answer: "One cannot fight against Fate. It was Schmid who first turned the neighbourhood upside down! It is Mauser who is in league with the devil! . . . They are going to pull you down, dear old house! All honour to you! Good-bye! . . . It is better to perish than to see what you would have seen. . . . There comes a moment in life when the best thing that old people—or old things—can do is to take themselves off quickly. . . . Good-bye, dear old casket of happy days, good-bye!"

It was time, then, to take farewell of the garden, the fountain, with its gay little song, the trees for which the axe was waiting. . . . On the Lake, the shadow of a sailing-boat, close in to the bank, glided by; the water sparkled in the hollows of the bays; . . . rising and falling in a gentle swell, the waves seemed to sigh; one could almost feel the heart of things beating. Suddenly a shout woke him from his reverie. Bigarreau was passing, his spade on his shoulder.

"Ha, ha! There's the gentleman of means! . . . Have you still got a word for your old friends? . . ."

For a moment Potterat was divided between his desire to impress the man with the spade, and his emotion, but his honest heart had the mastery. He made a wide sweep with his arms.

"The old garden. . . . I'm saying good-bye to it. . . . It's a bit hard to leave it all to go and twiddle my thumbs in a flat. . . ."

"Oh, my word! . . . Wouldn't I leave mine, if I only had the chance! . . . We poor beggars have to go on digging, and planting, and gathering, and selling. . . . While you'll only have to sit down and eat your meals when they come along. . . ."

"Quite true. . . . But that's the very worst thing that can happen to a man. . . ."

Bigarreau went off, not understanding Potterat's feelings in the least, and Potterat betook himself home to the Avenue des Roses, full to overflowing, at this hour, of noisy children, skipping, rolling in the dust, squalling at the top of their voices.

Ah, that first night in that mauve room, with its high panelled walls that seemed to demand mirrors! . . . in the solid walnut-wood bed, stranded in a corner, like some little fishing-boat driven in by stress of weather to a fashionable landing-stage. In the dawn, instead of the familiar sound of the gentle lapping of the waves, blending sweetly with the silence, the shrill whistle of the milkman going his rounds, the call of some hooter, the clack of shutters thrown back against the wall. . . . No more did the sky and the clouds stretching away into the blue distance, like a call to joy, meet one's waking eyes, but other windows, other balconies, a woman in her petticoat, her hair on her shoulders. . . .

"Did you think you were somebody else this morning when you woke?" said Potterat to his little son. "I slept fairly well, but when I woke I had to think hard for a minute or two before I remembered where I was. . . . What a change! . . ."

From the little white kitchen came the sound of singing.

"I do love arranging furniture and things," said Madame Potterat, in a half apologetic way, "and everything here is new . . . and pretty. . . . I think we shall be very happy here. . . . In about a fortnight, when I have got the place straight, you'll see how nice it will be."

So Potterat busied himself driving in nails, setting up the beds, putting the cupboards and other heavy furniture in place, hanging pictures, whilst Mi-Fou, who



had been shut up in an empty room to accustom him to his new home, filled the air with prolonged mewings.

"That cat is getting on my nerves," said the master of the house suddenly. "But I can understand how he feels. If I could mew, I should probably be doing the same. . . ."

"Instead of talking nonsense, suppose you come into town with me? I've still some little things to get for the drawing-room, a small table for photographs, a stand for plants, an overmantel, a picture or two . . . something bright and interesting, a figure-scene, perhaps. . . ."

"But what for? . . . Bigarreau and Cousin Mary will never dare to put a foot inside that drawing-room. . . . The sofas are so grand now that nobody will dare to sit on them. . . ."

"Oh, we shall have them in the dining-room. . . . But there will be new acquaintances. . . ."

"Who? . . . Diplomats? . . . Ambassadors? . . . Consuls? . . ."

She did not insist on the point, but replied:

"Look, I have fixed up a nice little corner for you specially that will remind you of old times. . . . I have put the old sofa in it, and the portraits opposite as they used to be. . . ."

Potterat laughed to hide his emotion; then seizing the cat, he put him up on the sofa, saying:

"There! . . . this is your home now. . . ."

But the cat sniffed suspiciously at the wall behind him, still damp.

"There, you see, you can't take in animals with talk. . . . We have broken up our old home, and that is all there is about it."

Just then, Carlo's voice was heard, shouting from an open window to some of his school friends:

"We are living here now. It's jolly, you know! It's a new house! . . ."

Every hour, almost, brought home to Potterat the

artificiality of his new life. His working clothes, for instance, were relegated to a sort of housemaid's cupboard under the stairs. Involuntarily, in spite of the broken-up meadow, in spite of the torn-down hedges, the 'gentleman,' as he called himself in bitter mockery, went back again and again to the old garden. From thence he brought various plants and flowers, taking care to leave round the roots a goodly quantity of their own native earth, and planted them unobtrusively in the few yards of ground that went with the flat in a corner of the courtyard, in the vain hope that he might, perhaps, acclimatize at the foot of those walls a little bit of the old garden which had been his life. Vain hope indeed! The sun itself soon showed him how impossible it would be to grow anything there: as quickly as possible it sped across that little corner of the sky, only to be blocked out by a tall chimney.

"If I were living on the fifth floor," said Potterat to himself, "I don't believe I should feel so oppressed. But to live night and day under four other families, it makes one feel as if one were in prison. . . . Oh, get to work! Get to work! If you look at the black side of things, it's all up with you, . . . absolutely! Think of something real . . . practical! . . . Go and fix up the cellar!"

But what pleasure can there be in arranging bottles of wine in a cellar which smells of cement, the ceiling of which is adorned with twisted, snake-like coils, the pipes of the central heating? Ah! how different from the cellar of Eglantine Cottage, so deep and cool, where the cheerful, wholesome smell of cheese, and vegetables, and apples lying on the straw, greeted one's nose as one entered. How can one help feeling miserable when one thinks of the difference? . . . A big earthenware pot of honey gathered one August day last year provoked fresh recollections. Raising the lid, Potterat sniffed the perfume. . . .

" Ah, I'm afraid it's going off ! . . . This honey that I have seen growing in the flowers. . . . Transplanted, it evaporates. It must stay in the place where it was born to be at its best. There, it really seemed the essence of the flowers . . . here, it seems only a preserve in a pot."

Mounting again to the flat, after talking severely to Carlo, whom he found sliding down the rail of the staircase, Potterat asked his wife:

" Well, have you finished the drawing-room yet ?"

" There are still the long curtains to hang."

" The long curtains ? . . . Have you two kinds then ? . . . There seems to be a perfect mania for complication. . . ."

Guessing that her husband was still fretting, Madame Potterat joined him at four o'clock where he was working in the tiny garden, closed in by a laurel hedge. On the little iron table in the summerhouse she put a teapot, cups and saucers, and some little cakes.

" Bravo ! . . . You are going to plant as much as possible from the old place. . . . When you have planted out a border, and placed our bench under that old pear-tree, we shall begin to feel quite at home. . . ."

" Quite so ! . . . I have counted, and there are only a hundred and sixty windows which look out on this courtyard. However, here on the right, in this corner, there is a comparatively sheltered spot."

He led his wife along the wall of the house, under the cemented roof formed by the balconies.

" There ! . . . It's only the old man who lives in the garret opposite who can overlook us here . . . and fortunately, he hasn't a bad face."

" Oh, this is nice ! . . . You'll see; everything will be in order soon. . . ."

" That's true. . . . Even in hell, everything can be in order."

One evening, as Potterat was coming back from Eglantine Cottage with a basket full of jonquils, he saw a striped ball of fur gliding along close to the wall . . . it was Mi-Fou.

"Hallo! . . . Where are you off to?"

But the cat did not hear him; with frantic leaps and bounds he was off to his old home.

"Well done! There's a fine character for you! . . . He's got the old Swiss spirit! . . . Ah, Mi-Fou, but when you see what they are doing at the old place, you will come back quickly enough!"

But Potterat was mistaken. Mi-Fou never came back, and they never saw him again, although they searched far and wide. His master said mournfully when he realized that further search was hopeless:

"I've never seen a cat I liked so well. . . . He really was as sensible, almost, as a human being. He understood every word you said. . . . Poor fellow, rather than live in this barrack, he has thrown himself under a tram, I'm sure. . . . Peace to his ashes!"

"David, come and look! . . . but don't come in yet, because of the parquet! . . ."

Potterat came and stood on the threshold. Freshly covered with red stuff, a sofa stood between the two large windows, which were draped with light lace curtains. On the opposite wall hung three engravings, a sunset scene, a flock of sheep, and a storm on the Lake; and over these, a big picture representing a hind with curved neck drinking from a spring. On the big table in the centre of the room lay some albums of views, spaced out symmetrically, a plant in a pot, brought from Eglantine Cottage. On the floor was a new carpet of brilliant hues, mostly red and blue. . . . And in the middle of all this stood Madame Potterat, her hands clasped in front of her, smiling with content and pride, longing for some words of praise.



"Well, what do you think of it?" she said.

"Where's the footman? . . . We really ought to have one to show people in here. . . . I say, must I take off my shoes always, before I walk on this carpet? . . . My poor Françoise! . . . I like my ease too much ever to want to come into this room, where I should be always saying 'Beg pardon!' 'Excuse me!' and that sort of thing. . . . The only thing that I really like about it are those growing plants, and the palms. For the rest, it's all very nice, but it's much too grand for me. . . ."

"Well, after all. . . . It is for Carlo. . . ."

In the look that accompanied these words, Potterat read such a depth of motherly love and pride that he shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"Ho! We're to be sacrificed to that imp, are we?" he muttered. . . . "Well, you'll see . . . the more we do for him, the more he'll despise us when we are old and helpless. . . ."

But in spite of these words, the thought that this blue and red drawing-room would one of these days help his son to climb to the top of the social ladder, filled him with an inordinate pride that he could not altogether conceal.

"I expect Carlo will do us credit one of these days. We shall be proud of him yet. . . ."

It was Sunday afternoon. . . . The clouds, which had been lowering all day, now gathered themselves up and burst in a torrent of rain which filled and overflowed the gutters. The outlook from the flat, on a courtyard surrounded by high walls, on which the rain made grey streaks, was dismal in the extreme. The iron roof of the little summerhouse in the courtyard shone like a helmet. . . . A cook in one of the other flats was humming a love-song over her work. . . . Sitting on the red sofa in the grand drawing-room, Potterat felt

himself lonely, useless, thrown aside as it were by life. . . . 'Out of the fulness of the heart, the mouth speaketh,' it is said; so Potterat spoke. . . . He spoke lengthily and freely, as much to himself as to his wife; bitter and sarcastic, he gave vent to all his pent-up feelings.

"Shut up in this box of a place," he said, "I feel just as if I were a prisoner tied and bound. A rabbit may get along in a cage perhaps, and even then he has room to move about, and he gets plenty of green stuff . . . but a cage is not the thing for a man, at any rate for a man worth the name. It is only these effeminate creatures here who could stand it. As for me, this sort of thing exasperates me. Any fellow boxed up in a tin of families like this, ends by getting a little of the flavour of all of them. . . . At Eglantine Cottage, I was David Potterat . . . but here! . . . It isn't every beast that can live in a menagerie; there are some who simply die of it, suddenly, some night or other. . . . Very well then! . . . And besides, I'm quite convinced that at night people's minds and spirits leave them, go out and about, and when people are crowded together like this, a man may very likely wake up next morning with his neighbour's fads and ideas instead of his own . . . nothing could be worse for a man of character, who isn't just like everybody else. . . . This house is like a Noah's ark; I have noticed all the different floors, I have even gone up to the attics, and what a Babel! . . . what a flying backwards and forwards! . . . I have met on the stairs some pretty women, dressed up to the eyes, powdered, clipped in with their tight skirts, so that they could scarcely move their legs, and their minds as narrow as their skirts, . . . going out with some of these rich young Brazilians . . . and in their flat everything pell-mell. All the luxury was on their backs. And you have only to look to guess the kind of people they are . . . one can't help putting two and two together. . . ."

"But how do you get to know all this?"

"When the doors on to the staircase are open, one sees a good deal. . . . The Tuschers, for instance, and the Blancs, and the Gorgerats, are all decent respectable people; they have children, and canaries, and things are kept clean and neat. . . . Then there are those two old maids, the Paturauds, with their sharp noses, their fat lapdogs, their thin shrill voices, their servants who never stay more than about a week . . . that's a regular wasp's nest, it's easy to see. . . . Then Kocheck's flat is very exotic. . . . At the music-master's flat, again, they are still in the middle of their honeymoon; that won't last any too long . . . poor things! At the flat opposite theirs, on the other hand, there will soon be a divorce, if I'm not very much mistaken; he never goes out but the door is slammed on his heels, and he goes off with his eyes half shut, frowning hard, and pulling at his cigar. Which of them is to blame? . . . Both, probably. . . . And then Zimmerli, the old man on the top floor, who plays the zither. . . . And ourselves . . . jumbled up with maids, rakes, old Hungarians, 'bad lots,' musicians, German-Swiss, the good and simple, and the hard and grasping. . . . All that must have an influence, in the long-run. When a man has his own house to himself, he's his own master, but here there is a perpetual whirl and rush, and one has perforce to whirl with the rest. . . ."

Potterat stopped to light his pipe. Then he went on again:

"Yes, you have to go with the crowd, if you have the use of your senses. . . . The senses are like open doors by which we communicate with the world. For instance, the ear . . . it hears every noise . . . there is no way of shutting out some of them and not others. The children yelling on the balconies, the mothers gossiping, the servants singing in their kitchens. . . .

But the worst of all is on hot nights . . . the sort of nights when in the country insects and emotions come to the surface . . . but here, everything goes at once, gramophones, violins, pianos, the zither on the fifth floor. . . . Midnight strikes, and then the habitués of the restaurant begin to get lively. All that laughing! . . . After one o'clock, when they *do* at last begin to think of settling down for the night, you can hear one sneezing, another one yawning, the striking of matches, the pulling of plugs, not to mention the babies that wake up and howl at intervals. . . . Then take the eyes. You open your window in the morning, and you see nothing but balconies, balconies, balconies, windows, windows, windows. . . . The nose brings you into contact with the smells and the cooking of other people's houses. . . . The sense of touch forces you into contact with others in the paint of the corridors, and the balustrades of the staircase, which everyone mauls. . . . Through the sense of smell the taste is affected . . . when you smell onions on the first floor, and hash on the fourth, you feel as if you were eating other people's dinners. . . . What do I want to prove? . . . Well, just this, that by living in a heap, as it were, one's five senses conspire to rob one of every scrap of individual character. . . . One is like a leaf in a salad bowl: it tastes of the whole contents of the salad. . . ."

"But look here, David. . . ."

"Wait a moment, I haven't finished yet. . . . The result is that I don't know myself. . . . When we were at Eglantine Cottage I had my feet on the ground and my head in the sun. . . . And such trees! . . . and chickens! . . . and tomatoes! . . . and my tools. . . . How lovely it was after rain, to see the sun shining in great slanting rays, for all the world like the ladder propped up against the big cherry-tree, only that the foot of the ladder was in the Lake, and its top resting on the



clouds. . . . And then, too, all those trains passing, . . . flying all over Switzerland, into France, into Germany, into Italy . . . and to watch the puffs of smoke over Meillerie, or Saint Prex, as one turned over the earth. . . . How we used to wonder about the travellers. . . . Ah, we lived then, we enjoyed life, . . . we sang, . . . we were amongst things, our own things, and not amongst people. . . . But here one is bored to death. . . .”

Madame Potterat had listened in silence, with tightly closed lips, to her husband's outburst, greatly distressed. At last she spoke:

“I was afraid that you were still feeling the change very much. . . . But I've gone through all that sort of thing too, David dear. . . . When we first went to Eglantine Cottage, I simply can't tell you how I hated it! . . . If it had not been that I was with you I could never have stood it. . . . But when people are together, a family, they can bear things. One waits. . . . Habits are formed. They bind you. And one fine day it seems all right. . . .”

“Well, well, it's all right now. Don't worry any more about me. . . . I must have a growl now and then . . . and this weather is enough to depress anyone. . . . I feel better already.”

Here they were interrupted by one of the Paturauds, who came to ask a little favour. With a great deal of unnecessary circumlocution she asked if they would exchange their day for the use of the general laundry attached to the flats. And she talked, and talked; then as Carlo came in, she said:

“Is this your boy? . . . The only one, I hope! . . .”

“I have two other sons, by my first wife,” . . . said Potterat, with extreme politeness. “It is very necessary to keep up the population of Switzerland, you see, in these days when we are so invaded. And the Vaudois people particularly should not be discouraged from doing

their duty in this way . . . they are too few as it is. . . . With these crowds of foreigners always passing through . . . nobody knows where they come from, or where they all go to, . . . it is very necessary to counteract all this by increasing our own good stock as much as we can. . . . Unfortunately, it isn't everyone who can. . . ."

When she got back to her own flat, Mademoiselle Paturaud said to her sister: "They are very obliging, those Potterats—but the husband is a little coarse. . . ."

At the same moment, Potterat was expressing his opinion of her.

"That's an ex-schoolmistress. . . . You can see it at once by her nose and her glasses."

The evenings were long and warm now, and the rosy sunset reflections lingered long over the Lake. Every window was open, and the street noises came up freely, gay laughter, the hoot of motor-horns, the steady tramping of passers-by, all bound for the promenade by the Lake.

"Shall we go out for a little walk, David?"

"Good heavens, no! What should we go out for? To see the people? . . . But in this flat we see other people all day long and every day . . . can't get away from them. . . . Besides, it's nearly nine o'clock. . . . Where's Carlo? . . ."

"Nine o'clock! . . . He ought to be in by now. I feel quite anxious."

After considerable searching, Potterat found his young hopeful playing with some little ragamuffins on a piece of waste ground near by.

"Come home at once, you naughty boy! . . ."

Arrived at the flat, he questioned him sternly.

"Now tell me where you've been and what you've been doing this evening."

The boy, half crying, explained:

"I was playing almost the whole time with the concierge's little boy, who is ill."

"That's a lie! . . . They put him to bed at six o'clock. . . . I'll teach you to tell lies, you young imp. . . . You worry your mother to death. . . . You give me the bother of hunting for you all over the place for nearly an hour. . . . Now I'm going to give you a real whipping, as they used to whip in the old days. . . . No, not in your clothes . . . on your bare skin. . . ."

Howls. Then a silence, broken only by the boy's whimperings.

"To-morrow, I shall find out the truth from the concierge. . . . Quick, now, into bed! . . ."

Once more, the husband and wife looked at each other.

"I wonder if you were right to whip him, David? . . . He is very young, and he's very sensitive. . . ."

"At his age, it's no use appealing to either his heart or his reason; it must be to another part of him. . . . Whip seldom, I agree with you there, but whip when he really deserves it. That's the best way."

"Oh, but you whip him too hard."

"When I whip him, I *do* whip him. It's no use pretending to."

The next morning, Potterat went down to the basement, to see the concierge. The door opened to disclose a room dimly lit by the light which fell through a grating in the pavement. Sitting in a low chair, huddled up like an old man, was a child with a face of wax, amusing himself by trying to look at the light through a rosy piece of onion skin. With his red cheeks, his big hearty voice, Potterat might well have been an inhabitant of another world. Almost at once the child began to cheer up.

"He is very small for his age, poor little man," said his mother. "And he has had almost every illness that

there is, I think. . . . He wants more air and sun. . . . And you see the kind of flat we have. . . . There is the courtyard, certainly, but the sun beats down on the gravel so. . . .”

“Does my boy come and play with him sometimes?”

“Oh no, sir. One couldn’t expect it. Active, strong children like him don’t understand these others. . . .”

“I tell you what, Madame, bring your little boy up to the little garden on the right of the courtyard, the one where the old pear-tree is, whenever you like. . . . There are a few bushes there, and some flowers, and a little shade, and it’s better than nothing. . . . I like this little boy of yours, we’re going to be great friends, he and I, but we must get a little colour into his cheeks. . . .”

As he sat at dinner, Potterat told them about his visit.

“What a shame, in these big new buildings, to make the porters’ flats right down almost underground. . . . Yes, Carlo, I’ve seen the little Robert, whom you never went to see, because he goes on crutches. . . . Pale isn’t the word for it! . . . White as a sheet, and thin as a lath! And he stammers too. . . . Of course he can’t go to school. . . . There he is, living in a sort of twilight all the morning, and in the dark from about four o’clock in the afternoon, playing with a broken doll, while you are fat and rosy-cheeked, you can run about, and frolic with other boys in the street. . . . Well, I’m going to bring the poor little fellow up every day, and settle him amongst the flowers under the pear-tree.”

Madame Potterat was almost weeping with pity.

“Poor little fellow! And I will bring him down some bread and a cup of milk at four.”

Rather ashamed of himself, Carlo bent his face down over his plate.

The little garden, scarcely bigger than a room, was a Paradise to little Robert. He would stay there for



hours together, sitting beside the flowers, his eyes closed in rapture, his hare-lipped mouth open as if to drink in as much sun as possible. Carlo brought his aeroplanes, his trains, etc., to show him, delighted to dazzle this feeble little creature so ready to wonder and admire. And Potterat watered his shrubs and flowers, and pruned the six tomato plants which formed a border to the flower-bed.

"You watch and see what beautiful red cheeks they'll have, these tomatoes, by the time August comes. You must hurry up and get your cheeks just as red by then."

Now and then when they were alone, he asked the little boy:

"And do you like Monsieur Potterat?"

"Oh yes!" the boy would reply, and if he felt sure that no one was in sight, the big man would lean down and kiss the little face.

Another friend of Potterat's was Zimmerli on the top floor, an old bank clerk. He amused himself in the evenings by singing and accompanying himself on the zither. His voice was somewhat cracked, but still had a good deal of charm. Sometimes his white head showed itself at the window between two boxes of geraniums. Then from below Potterat would call up to him:

"That's a pretty air. . . . That last thing you played. . . . Wasn't it 'The Cabin Boy's Farewell'?"

"That's it. . . ."

"I thought so. . . . I'm a bit of a musician myself. . . . I play the cornet. . . ."

"Ah, you play the cornet? . . ."

"Yes. . . . I must begin and practise again one of these days. . . . I was sent this morning the cornet part of a Barcarolle. . . . there are some splendid runs in it. . . ."

One evening when his wife was out, Potterat took up his cornet practice again. He was in the middle of one

of the famous runs, marking the time with his heel, when 'thump, thump, thump' was heard from below, at measured intervals . . . evidently the Demoiselles Patureaud knocking authoritatively on their ceiling. Potterat stopped short. Then he shouted:

"I pay my rent . . . I'm in my own house. . . . Do I pound sugar on the floor every time you strum on your piano? . . . What in thunder! . . . Everyone has a right to his instrument. . . ."

The knocking ceased. As a sign of victory, Potterat played the 'March to Copenhagen' with great verve.

Potterat by this time was well known in the flats; he had a pleasant word and a smile for everyone he met on the stairs and landings: he stroked the cats, especially Madame Hautefeuille's, and asked to be put down for one of her kittens.

"But, Monsieur," Madame remonstrated, "he is a tom-cat!"

"Really! . . . Oh, that's a pity! . . . He would have had some beautiful kittens if he had been a lady. . . . Well, it can't be helped. . . ."

But his lighthearted gaiety failed him at times, and regrets, choosing the right moment, returned to the attack in force. At such times Potterat would take a glass down to the cellar, and drink to make himself forget. He drank with a fierce taciturnity, his hat tipped over one ear, a bitter smile curling his lips, and he grumbled to himself as he drank:

"Good Heavens! What a life! . . ."

"You're getting fat, Potterat," Bigarreau told him one day.

"Ay, a man will begin to put on flesh if he's bored to death half the time, and has nothing to do the other half. . . . For a man to have to retire when he's still perfectly fit and well is the worst possible thing for him. . . . A man can't read the paper all day . . . nor analyse

the world and its folly all the time . . . he'd end by being as mad as the rest. . . . What can a man do ? . . . I get up, I go out, I come in, I go to bed, . . . I get up again, go out again, come in again, and go to bed again. . . . That's all I've got to do. It's an impossible life. . . ."

"But you have your little bit of garden here. . . ."

"Yes, it's a fine garden, isn't it ? . . . If all the looks that it gets in the course of the day took root, there would be a perfect forest of eyes in a night. . . . It's a wretched place ! . . ."

"And what about Madame Potterat ? . . . Does she like this sort of thing ? . . ."

"Rather ! Women are more adaptable, less given to reflection. We like to think over things a bit ; they are content to skate over the surface of them."

Things were in this state when one day Sergeant Delessert knocked at Potterat's door. Potterat's voice was heard thundering within.

"What's going on here ? . . ." demanded the police sergeant as soon as the door was opened. "Do you want me to take somebody to the station for you ?"

"Oh, it's this imp of a boy of mine. I'm just shutting him up in the boot-hole for a bit. . . . He thinks he can do whatever he likes, he runs off goodness knows where, without leave, and comes home at all hours. . . . He goes about with a gang of disreputable young ruffians who are fast making him as bad as themselves. . . . And he has the impudence to cheek me. . . . That I can't stand. . . . Oh no, this barrack of a place isn't good for anybody, boys, or men, or anyone. . . . And it was for him principally, for the sake of his future career, that we came to live here. . . . But these boys, they have neither decency nor common sense, neither respect for their elders, nor fear of the authorities ; they

don't care for anything or anyone. . . . It's positively heart-breaking. . . . And I'm becoming a regular old grumbler with it all, as sulky as a bear with a sore head, suspicious, irritable, bored and boring. . . ."

"Oh, you're no worse than the rest of us. . . . We've all got our worries . . . in the police as elsewhere. . . . In fact, I've come to ask your advice about a matter that is worrying us just now. . . . The fact is, that for the last three weeks or so, someone has been robbing the alms-boxes at the Cathedral. We have set traps, we have posted extra police there, we have mounted guard almost day and night, talked it over at the police-station, and tried everything we could think of; in spite of it all, our man emptied the boxes again only last Sunday, immediately after the service! . . . You know how it is . . . a great many foreigners go to see the Cathedral; they see 'For the Poor' written up, and they generally drop in a coin, by way of a sop to their consciences, I dare say. . . . And in this way these boxes are pretty sure to have some money in them always. . . . Well, as long as this robbery goes on, it's a humiliation for us, you know. . . . This morning two or three of the older men were talking together, and somebody said:

" 'I wish Potterat was here still. I never knew anyone like him for getting to the bottom of things. . . . He knows every trick and dodge of these gentry, and a few more . . . ' so there it is . . . they want to know if you'll think it out and suggest something. . . ."

Potterat's eyes fairly shone with delight. Out of the window flew his cares and his depression.

"Ha! Do they really mean it? You're not pulling my leg, are you? . . ."

"No, no, I assure you. . . . It's all right. . . ."

Potterat gave one of his huge laughs, like those of the old days—a frank, hearty, infectious laugh.



"Sit down, Delessert, and have a glass. . . . When they call over the roll of responsible citizens in any time of danger or difficulty I'm ready. . . . When society is in danger, I show up. . . . And it's quite true, I used to do some good work in the police. . . . I had the knack of it, you know. . . . You want to be able to spot things with half an eye, as it were, and you must have a quick judgment, and be able to sift out the lies from the truth, . . . and perseverance, . . . you must be like a sleuth hound on their tracks. But these young men they're taking into the police force nowadays . . . young dandies, twirling their moustaches. . . . All they care about is flirting with the servant girls, and they think themselves invincible because they take courses in boxing and jiu-jitsu. . . . What good are they in a case of this sort? . . . No, when real difficulties crop up, it's to us older men, with our old-fashioned methods, that they look, hey! . . . Isn't that so? . . . Here's to you, Delessert. . . ."

"Here's to you, Inspector."

## CHAPTER V

FILTERING through a green curtain, the light of the setting sun fell on a group sitting in conclave in the police-station, discussing the Cathedral mystery. Sergeant Delessert, and Constables Pache, Bourreloup, and Crausaz, sat with folded arms listening, while Potterat expounded his plan to them.

"I tell you, for four whole days I have haunted that Cathedral at all hours of the day; I've nosed round about everywhere, loitered near the collection boxes, kept an eye on them from the organ-loft . . . and everything was all right. One morning I really thought I had found the thief in an old Englishwoman who was drawing away in a notebook, and all the while backing up to the box near the north door . . . she was so thin that I could almost see through her . . . but after tracking her down carefully, I had to admit that I was on the wrong scent . . . she didn't take the least notice of the box. . . . Well then, only yesterday evening, I put a whole collection of false coins that I happened to have by me, into one of the boxes, and this morning they were all gone! . . . the box had been cleaned out as bare as the palm of my hand. . . . So now I've come to this conclusion—that the thief, whoever he is, hides himself in the Cathedral somewhere just about closing time, and does his work in the dark. But this evening I'm going to spend the night with him, and there'll be two of us to share the money. . . ."

"Look out for ghosts . . ." said Bourreloup.

Potterat was indignant at this remark.

"Ghosts!" he said, "there aren't any such things, except in the minds of silly old women. . . . People live and die, and are put away . . . and that's the end of them. . . . Who's going to prowling round here again, when they can no longer eat or drink? . . . I remember once at Vidy, there was a foreigner who complained that his house was haunted. Well, I slept there five nights, and I never slept better in my life. . . . At the beginning of the night, certainly, there was a good deal of noise, mice scratching, rats chasing each other behind the walls, the old wood creaking, plaster falling from a ceiling, an insect dying, all absolutely natural, commonplace noises. . . . Oh no, it's a man's own unbalanced mind that plays him these tricks! . . . The night is just the same as the daytime, except that one can't see so well. And I'm not a boy, you know, nor a Savoyard nurse. . . ."

Bourreloup, however, was not to be shaken in his belief in ghosts.

"All right! Have it your own way. . . . All the same I don't much care for these ancient buildings that nobody knows even who built. . . . You'll take a weapon of some sort, won't you?"

"Oh, I've got my revolver always, in case of serious resistance or unexpected attack. . . . Two shots in the air, by way of warning, and four in earnest. . . . Besides, I've got felt shoes to walk about in the building without waking the echoes, and my electric lamp, and some bread, sausage, and a bottle of wine . . . it's a long watch, you know, and one needs a bite or two about two o'clock in the morning."

The others were silent, filled with admiration for his coolness.

"Well, we wish you good luck."

"There's no such thing as luck in these affairs. . . ."

Everything is thought out and arranged beforehand; I've chosen the corner where I shall keep watch, commanding the boxes. . . . At the first sound, a rush of about thirty yards or so, and I'm on the top of the thief . . . I arrest him, and bring him along here to you, and there you are. . . . We old hands don't chatter as much as the young ones, but we have our method. . . . I'll get there about half an hour before closing time, I'll walk about with the crowd, and when I come to my corner I quietly disappear without anyone seeing me. . . . The public go out, and the place is locked up for the night . . . and there we are, we two. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

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From the lower town rose the sound of crowds, of hurrying to and fro, of life, but above, where the Cathedral raised its towers to the sky, all was still. An odd sort of chill seemed to be in the air, and a weird, unearthly smell came to Potterat's nostrils, as he lay crouched behind a group of pillars. Defiantly he breathed the air saturated with dead prayers. Glancing aside, he could see on the windows the light of a distant street lamp, and the stars dancing as in deep water. A chequered reflection played on the worn flagstones of the floor, and streaked the walls with ladders of flickering gleams. . . . At regular intervals, booming from its high prison of stone, the great bell sounded menacingly. . . . Midnight struck . . . the street lamp was extinguished. The steps of the man who walks about at night with a pole on his shoulder resounded on the pavement, then receded in the distance. . . . Suddenly the darkness seemed to grow thicker, more intense . . . and there were mysterious whisperings, glidings, crackings, rustlings of wings. . . .

"Well! There's no doubt that one's comfortable bed at home would be better than this," said Potterat to himself, as he sat up on the hard chair he had put in



his corner beforehand. "What is that? . . ." A huge hairy spider ran across his hand. Potterat shook it off with disgust.

"Yah! . . ." he whispered to himself. "Why in the name of creation did the good God want to make such horrid beasts? . . . Never mind!" he encouraged himself, "it isn't a few bats, or a couple of rats scuffling together, that are going to break my nerve. I'm here in a good cause. I have law and justice on my side; I'm sent here officially, and neither the devil nor any of his works is going to get the better of me. . . . The first thing that moves, I'll arrest it, and run it in. . . ."

One o'clock struck, then two. Before striking, the hammer whirled, a murmur ran under the vaults, and the blow on the bell which followed struck against the columns, and resounded through the building like the groaning of a soul in pain.

"Good Heavens, what a row! . . . And my feet are beginning to freeze. . . . I think it's about time to have some food. . . ."

Potterat drew from his capacious pockets a bottle and a packet, which he unrolled carefully and noiselessly. Methodically, he took a bite of sausage, then a bite of bread.

"Ha, that's better! Well, it's the first time I've eaten a meal under these conditions. . . . There's nothing like eating to put one in good heart. . . . As long as one can eat, everything is all right. . . ."

When Potterat uncorked the bottle, in spite of all his precautions there was a loud 'tiouc.' . . . Immediately the vaults re-echoed repeatedly 'Tiouc! . . . Tiouc! . . . Tiouc! . . .'

"There's no place like a Cathedral for giving you away!" said Potterat to himself. "Here's to you! . . ."

Thirsty lips encircled the neck of the bottle; slowly, surely, it was emptied, and Potterat said again to himself:

“ Ah, to put life into a man, there’s nothing like eating and drinking; as long as a man can do that he’s all right. . . . Now then, my friend, what’s the use of sticking behind this pillar all night? . . . You have felt shoes, now’s the time to make use of them. Take a turn round the church, and climb into the pulpit. From there you’ll be able to see all round. . . . You can sit in the armchair, and you have the whole congregation under your eye. . . . Here goes! . . . ”

But when Potterat was at length installed in the high pulpit, perched up, as it were, between heaven and earth, he began to feel himself very small indeed, in spite of his great bulk. The windows opposite him shone in the darkness with a ghostly blue light. Some inexplicable sounds sent cold shivers over him. . . . Fear? . . . No, not that, but uneasiness, an uncomfortable sinking of the heart, that was all. . . . He tried to rally himself out of it, but his sarcasms fell flat. . . . Hark! What was that? . . . Someone whispering? . . . There is no doubt, big and strong though one may be, the voice of the centuries imprisoned, as it were, under these resounding vaults has some effect on one’s nerves . . . that voice which is heard in the rustling of the branches against the windows, the moaning of the wind, the very silence, that terrifying silence of all those who used to frequent these aisles, and are now dead. Most of all is this silence terrifying to a man like Potterat, jovial, gay, a bit of a gourmand, and a lover of the sunshine and gaiety of life. For perhaps the first time in his life, Potterat laid his finger on the tragedy of things. This God, of Whom one talks so freely, to Whom one devotes an hour or so a month, in Whose honour one sings a hymn or two, and murmurs a prayer into one’s hat, He was there, actually standing there, terrible, knowing each and every blackguardism of those who lay under these stones in impalpable dust; here, and

yet everywhere, leaning over those who slept, reading their secret thoughts, noting everything in His book, putting a cross here and there, perhaps, against a date, meaning: 'Thou wilt die on such a day, at such an hour.' . . .

"I'm no worse than others," reasoned Potterat with himself. "If I'm not one of the best of men, I'm a long way from being one of the worst. . . . There are extenuating circumstances. . . . I have quarrelled with my son-in-law, certainly, but whose fault is that? . . ."

A grey light, ineffably sad, tempered the thick darkness in the Cathedral. Four o'clock. . . . Potterat's thoughts took another turn.

"I wonder if it's so very difficult to preach after all! . . . One gets up, and stretches out one's arms, and says: 'My brethren! I want you to fix your thoughts for a little while on the words which' . . . and so on, and so on. There you are! . . . With a little practice, I believe I could preach as good a sermon as anyone. . . . A little appeal for repentance to finish up with, a prayer, the benediction. . . . Oh, I should have been as good a parson as any of them. . . ."

Little by little day dawned. Very soon the backs of the seats could be seen, then the stalls, then the Communion Table. In front of Potterat lay the big pulpit Bible, on a green cloth. He opened it haphazard, and read: 'For behold, we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. . . .' Closing the book again solemnly, Potterat slowly and ceremoniously came down the pulpit stairs. A door creaked.

"Well?" said the concierge.

"My word, your Cathedral is a place of horrors! One gets frightened almost of one's own shadow. . . . As for finding a thief in this labyrinth, it's perfectly hopeless. . . . Did I hear anything? . . . Oh yes, I heard plenty,

but I saw nothing, although I kept my eyes open, I can tell you. . . .”

They went together to the largest box where some small change had been placed as a trap. There was nothing there.

“Damnation! . . . And yet I’ve had my eyes glued on that spot. . . . But who could see in that pitch blackness? . . . There is darkness and darkness. Here, you might imagine yourself hundreds of feet under water. I couldn’t see my hand in front of me. . . . Oh well, I’m coming back again to-night. Only I’ll adopt another plan, and to-morrow morning you’ll see the thief as large as life. . . . But don’t say a word to anyone. . . . Now I’m going home to breakfast.”

“Well? . . .” said also the police sergeant when Potterat entered the police-station. That he had drawn a blank was very evident by his drooping moustache, and the dejected stoop of his shoulders.

“You see it’s not so easy after all,” said Bourreloup.

“What’s that? . . . Well, one can’t arrest bats. . . . Besides, the first night one can only reconnoitre, make a few notes, and settle on a plan. . . . Lay the train, so to speak. Then the next night we blow them up.”

“You’re going there again? . . .” said Delessert.

“I think so. . . . The police need plenty of patience. . . . The man who is put off at the first check isn’t much of a detective. I shall spend my nights in the Cathedral to the end of my days if necessary, but I shall get the better of the rascal. . . . On the other hand, it’s no use trying to hide the fact that it isn’t going to be an easy job. . . . To stay all night alone in that old pile in the dark; to wander about a place built in the thirteenth century, by people of doubtful morals, a place with all kinds of corners, and nooks, and crypts, and tombstones, and old statues . . . well, there are not many men who would do it, I can tell you. . . . If you stay in one



place, you can see nothing, if you walk about, you seem to set the whole place in a commotion. . . . No, whichever way you look at it, it isn't an easy job. . . ."

"Some people say that at night, when the wind is up, the organ plays of itself, in muffled tones, of course. . . . Is that true, do you think? . . ."

"Certainly! There are puffings, and blowings, and creakings, and wheezy notes, over and over again. . . ."

"It's the instrumentation working," said Delessert scientifically. "With all those pipes, the least breath of air makes a sound."

Potterat was not to be outdone.

"Naturally. . . . It's not the devil playing himself a hymn. Every noise has a sensible explanation. . . . A man who has spent thirty years in the police has a pretty good idea of what a variety of noises there are at night. . . . Silly people talk about fairies, and spirits, and ghosts, but the man who has his wits about him looks for the cause, and is able to distinguish and diagnose the noise at once."

"That's all very well . . ." said Pache, in a meaning voice.

"What's all very well? . . . The days of fairy stories are past. We're too emancipated for that nowadays. Well, I'm off to breakfast."

"Well? . . ." said Madame Potterat, in her turn, looking rather pale.

"Well, nothing . . . except that I'm simply ravenous."

"Have you caught him? . . ."

"Caught who? . . . Did you really think I was going to get him at the first attempt? . . . Oh no, he's too sharp for that. It's cunning against strategy. . . . Give me time. . . . All the same, I don't think you'll find three men in Central Europe who'll be ready to pass the night, absolutely alone, in a Cathedral. It needs plenty

of pluck, and good steady nerves. Why, a man might be set upon and cut to pieces by some madman, and no one outside would know anything about it until seven o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, David dear! . . . What I suffered last night! . . . And the Lake was so stormy and loud. . . . I had all sorts of horrible thoughts. . . . And knowing that you were in cold, and danger . . . do you think I could get a wink of sleep? Not likely! . . . If you love me, David, you must not think of going again. . . . I have such presentiments. . . . Just now, too, I felt all queer. . . . As soon as Carlo had gone off to school, I had a regular fit of hysterics. . . . I couldn't help it, David."

"My dear, women are always like that. They never look at things as men do. But I'm too hungry now to discuss the point."

And he sat down to the table and attacked with vigour the coffee and cream, the bread and fresh butter, the strawberry jam. Presently, his hunger allayed, Potterat relented at the sight of his wife's anxious face.

"All right, dear, all right! . . . I'm here safe and sound. What more do you want? . . . 'La Suisse est belle.' . . . And we've plenty of good food to eat. So what are you crying about?"

Madame Potterat dried her eyes.

"Oh, don't talk, David, you don't understand a bit. Men argue, . . . but women feel. . . ."

"And don't I feel too? . . . I feel that this jam is delicious, that this bread is new. . . ."

As he spoke, he watched her from the corners of his eyes, vaguely touched by her evident anxiety on his behalf. Someone knocked at the door. It was Zimmerli.

"Has he come back yet?"

"Yes, he's at breakfast now."

"Well? . . ."

"Oh, come in for a minute. He'll tell you all about it."

"Well? . . ." repeated Zimmerli, the moment he saw Potterat.

"Everybody I've seen this morning says 'Well? . . . Well? . . .' Well, what about it? . . . You didn't expect, did you, that anything was going to happen in one night, when it's a question of dealing with expert thieves? . . . It will take time, courage, shrewdness."

"What was it like in the Cathedral at night?"

"Well, you'd think all the time that someone was rolling things about on the flagstones. And the groans, and creaks, and strainings. . . . I can't get it out of my mind that in spite of all the prayers and good words that are said there, there's no place where there are more devils than in these churches. . . . It makes one think, you know. . . ."

"And you really intend to go again?"

"I'm going again, certainly! . . . You can think of me to-night about midnight, . . . you in your bed, warm and snug and comfortable, and everything quiet and peaceful all round, and me up there, in the middle of all sort of horrors. . . ."

"Oh, David, are you really going again?"

Potterat, with a steely glance first at his wife, then at Zimmerli, replied firmly:

"I'm going again. . . . Duty must be done. . . ."

Outside the night was stormy and dark. Quivering flashes of lightning played amongst the piled masses of cloud, making them take all sorts of shapes, here sharks with open jaws, there armed ships of war. . . . Suddenly the moon shone out. Through a blue stained-glass window it shed an unreal light. Some mysterious hand up above the earth seemed to open suddenly the sluice-gates of Joy, then to close them again. . . . Again all was black. . . . A quivering flash twisted across the sky . . . lit up a window in which a fiery dragon pursues

a cavalier galloping under twinkling stars . . . then again darkness. . . . Crouching behind his pillar, Potterat thought:

“How in the wide world is it possible to hide here? . . . With the lightning jumping out and about like this, when you least expect it, marking out your face, and taking the imprint of your skull. A pretty sort of hiding place it is, when you throw shadows fifty yards long, right up into the vaults almost. . . . You might as well expect a Prussian to have a round head, as to think of surprising a thief here. . . . No, there’s nothing for it but to change one’s plan. . . . Since Heaven chooses to play you tricks like these, and since the thunder too ranges itself on the side of the enemy, and makes it impossible to catch him, what you’ve got to do is to walk up and down this Cathedral boldly and openly, up one side and down the other, taking a turn round the pillars, going down into the crypt, and up into the galleries, and looking into every niche. If the thief doesn’t already suspect that there is someone here, he is a greater fool than I give him credit for. . . . The upshot of it all will be that, feeling himself discovered, he will pack up his traps and take himself off. . . . To arrest someone would be the best thing, certainly, but to put them to flight is also good . . . and, as far as the public is concerned, we can easily find some explanation that will save our credit. . . . Right! . . . Up! . . . March! . . . No more hiding, . . . let him see that there is someone on guard, and that his game is up.”

So Potterat began his beat, his hands behind his back, whistling a lively air, which the vaults took up and repeated approvingly. . . . A door, hidden in a deep embrasure, disclosed a staircase descending into black depths. . . . Turning on his electric lamp, Potterat resolutely went down this, until a gate suddenly barred his passage, through the bars of which he could discern



dimly a sort of cellar, at a still lower depth, and some strange forms outlined by the flickering light.

"Good Lord! . . . The cemetery of the old monks. . . . It is! . . . I can see skulls, and grinning rows of teeth, and deep eye-sockets, skeletons lying on the stones, their hands crossed on their breasts. . . . How many centuries have they been lying there? . . . Never in the world will the good God be able to find them again, thrust away in this corner. . . . Anyhow, they're sleeping peacefully enough, and when one gets to that stage, one doesn't care very much what happens, I should think. . . . Each in his place, each in his row, no more evil words from those silent lips. They covet neither gold nor silver any more. . . . They sleep, and sleep, and sleep. And they wait. . . . New Year and vintage time come round again and again, and still they lie there, calm and peaceful. . . . And we others who are alive are hungry, and thirsty, and greedy, and quarrelsome. . . . And to think that it will all end in this! . . ."

There was a long silence. Leaning his elbows on the top of the gate, Potterat moved his lamp about . . . the shadows seemed to move . . . some spiders, suddenly awakened, ran nimbly, on their long thin legs, along their threads, fixed across the vault. . . . Heavens! that skeleton with the yellow skull, like some monstrous empty shell, had it moved? . . . had it spoken? . . .

"Here! Let's get out of this!" said Potterat to himself. He beat a hasty retreat, half turning as he went, to make sure that none of the dead men were following him, to place their long bony fingers on his shoulder. . . . He walked past the tombs where the Bishops lay full length, impassive, cold, their marble faces turned up to the ceiling, showing their chipped noses. . . . Would they also rise, and walk at the head of the procession of skeletons, . . . accompanying the intruder, step by step, gliding along the walls, noiselessly as shadows? . . .

"Hein? . . ." said Potterat again, this time out loud. And immediately the whole Cathedral re-echoed from every side, 'Hein! . . . Hein! . . .' Distant rumblings of thunder now began to shake the windows, dying away in subterraneous growlings, which never ceased and seemed to rise again from the lowest depths. Potterat turned on his beat once more, holding his lamp out at arm's length. Who was that creeping behind him on tiptoe? . . . Mysterious movements seemed to be going on under the arcades, over the pointed arches, . . . and yet how deadly still it was! . . . Then a sudden puff of wind, a long-drawn wail, a rattling of the windows, and a whisper seemed to descend from the vaults and pass along the aisles, a cold, grave-like breath also. . . . Then, as if the metal did not wish to be idle, when wood and glass were so busy, the organ pipes began to add their voice, a wail, soft and long-drawn-out, scarcely more than a sigh, ending suddenly in a raucous noise like a death-rattle. The hurly-burly of life prevents one from noticing these lesser noises at ordinary times, but when the world is asleep, they wake up. . . . The storm came up nearer; lightning played no longer in fitful gleams, but wrote with fingers of white fire things like convulsed vipers on the walls. Sheets of sulphur-coloured flame fell on the flagstones, rolled round the columns, or leaped up to the high galleries, where the gilded organ pipes flashed sudden fire.

Bent almost in two, his hands clenched, Potterat, his heart beating painfully, was gliding gently along the choir-stalls, when two eyes suddenly appeared through the darkness, a chair was moved, the scratching of nails on the back of a bench was heard. By the pale greenish light of the next flash, Potterat saw a shadow which moved, a man standing up and apparently making faces. . . . His blood seemed to rush through his veins for a moment. Glued to the spot, his heart beating a tattoo,

his throat dry, too taken aback for the moment even to pull out his revolver from its inner pocket, he shouted in a stentorian voice:

"Halt, or I fire! . . . Halt! . . . I arrest you! . . . Fire! . . ."

The thunder seemed to obey the order; the building rocked to its base. Terrified, the black cat, who had been in the habit of climbing up by the roof of a shed, and creeping in through a little pane left open in a window to the shelter of this place where it never rained, fled away under the seats. As for the statue of the Bishop, seen standing there as usual in the recurring flashes of lightning, he went on blessing, to all appearance, the sculptured personages of the choir-stalls, very stiff-looking knights, holy nuns with meekly folded hands, seraphim with folded wings, devils with horns, with forks, with tongues of fire. Some of them had thick lips overhanging their beards, those of others were rounded in prayer.

"Charge! . . ." commanded the warlike Potterat. "Madman, ghost, thief, or devil, take him prisoner. . . ."

"It's all very well to say 'Charge!'" said Potterat, the man of peace, to himself, "but a fatal blow may easily be given . . . and when a man is down, he's done for . . . he's talked of for two or three days, and then. . . . And you're a married man, with a family. . . . And your poor wife has had presentiments about you. . . . Don't tempt Fate. . . ."

Then out loud he said, in a stern voice, tempered, however, with a certain good-nature:

"Come along now! No more nonsense! . . . We're here in force. . . . You are surrounded! . . . I arrest you! . . ."

The steady light of the electric lamp was turned on the enemy, and Potterat saw then clearly the statue of the Bishop, and the assembly of saints and devils. Look-

ing at the tails, the horns and the wings, he felt ill at ease.

"Good Heavens! . . . I wonder who in the world made those things! . . . He must have had plenty of time to waste. . . ."

Then suddenly, furious with himself for his emotion, and regardless for the moment of prudence, he began to abuse the grinning faces.

"H'm! you there with the hook-nose, I wouldn't go bail for you for five cents! . . . Putting out your tongue like that! . . . What sort of manners do you think you've got? . . . Trying to frighten decent people going about their business. . . ."

Then almost immediately, abashed by all the eyes that stared at him so severely, Potterat recovered his self-possession and his politeness.

"Oh, beg pardon! . . . Excuse me! . . . I made a mistake. . . . I didn't mean anything just now. . . . The fact is, I'm so upset with all these outlandish noises, those dead people, and the lightning, and the organ playing, and these ghosts, and devils, and angels, and I don't know what all . . . that I'm not quite myself, and that's a fact. . . ." Then to himself he added: "How I'm going to catch anybody under these conditions I don't know. . . . I wash my hands of the whole thing. . . ."

His heart still thumping, Potterat flung himself on a bench, where he sat motionless for a time, a prey to his reflections.

"If Heaven is anything like this, it strikes me it's the sort of place a man would rather want to keep away from. . . . I'm certain no one will ever see me again in this phantom ship. . . . It's a funny thing, now, I'm not a bit afraid, and yet I've got cramps in my stomach. . . . I don't believe in ghosts, and yet I have the strangest sensation, as if there were things



floating about that one can't see . . . as if something tickled me on the back of the neck, laid a hand between my shoulder-blades, poked me in the ribs. . . . No, it's better not to risk annoying . . . annoying . . . well, anyhow, it's better to be on the safe side. . . . And what an old fool a man is who is too young for his years ! . . . To think that at this moment the whole of Europe is asleep in its bed, . . . the whole of Christianity flat on its back, on feathers, or on a plank, or under a hedge, or in a cradle, or in a coffin . . . all sleeping. . . . And the world, the universe, the stars, the Milky Way, God Himself, the shooting stars ? . . . Oh, even if a man has a clear head, and good circulation, and a first-rate digestion, he can't begin to understand things."

Shadows danced like smoke wreaths, the storm died away into the distance, gathering up the lightnings, now only a faint flicker of yellow light. Sitting still, with his arms folded, Potterat began to go over his past life. He saw his first wife, Jenny; he saw his son and daughter, Ernest and Louise, now more or less estranged from him, as children again; he remembered his mother, above all, with a surprising intensity, a thin, active, severe peasant woman . . . his father also he recalled; and then Carlo and his wife, bringing the coffee-pot . . . and then . . . Overcome by an irresistible desire for sleep, Potterat's head nodded, his body relaxed. . . . How delicious ! . . .

"Eh ! . . . What ? . . . Who's there ? . . . What's the matter ? . . . Where the devil am I ? . . ."

Potterat woke up, astonished to find the ceiling so high. Ten times the echoes repeated "Where the devil ? . . ." the bishops and saints all round listening.

"Good gracious, I mustn't speak. They repeat every word I say."

Just here a tickling assailed his nostrils, and he gave a loud sneeze like the report of a gun. The sneeze went

echoing round the place indefinitely. It seemed as if the whole Cathedral had a cold. . . . Like the sullen humming of a beehive after sunset, the noise persisted under the vaulted roof. To reassure himself, the author of all this hubbub held his watch to his ear; the familiar tick-tick assured him that life was still going on.

Presently the thick veil of darkness was torn. A clear ray of light came through the windows and drove away the shadows into the side-aisles, and behind the pillars. As on the evening before, the seats reappeared, decorously grouped round the pulpit. Suddenly, a ray of sunlight struck full on the great East window. The austere wall took fire, as it were. It was like a springtime bursting into blossom, a glittering of fairy diamonds. Truly it seemed almost worth while to have gone through those terrors of the night to share in this splendour. Good fairies seemed to shelter under those flowers with glowing petals, and dragons fled before the aureoles.

Potterat rose from his bench.

“What on earth would people do without the sun? . . . Nothing soothes one’s mind, and cheers one up like sunshine. . . . As for that thief, he has found his master. . . . I don’t think he’ll come back again in a hurry! . . .”

Potterat’s words were truer than he thought. About one o’clock in the morning, when the storm was at its height, a suspicious-looking individual, a specialist in false keys, had emerged from the shadows; had noiselessly opened the little north door; had seen, down there in front of the Bishop’s statue, a man gesticulating wildly, and calling on the Bishop to surrender at once on pain of instant death. He had retreated, gliding away as noiselessly as he had come, without too much regret. ‘The game wasn’t worth the candle,’ he thought. ‘There are only a few false coins now in these boxes . . . .’

Open-mouthed the policemen listened.

"I can't describe to you what it was like. . . . You'd never believe me. . . . You were very nearly finding a dead body in that Cathedral this morning."

"Whose?"

"Mine, by Jove! . . ."

"Did he go for you?"

"It happened under the organ loft. . . . It was dark enough to have been the night before creation. . . . Then a flash of lightning! . . . I saw him suddenly right in front of me, a huge creature, enormous! . . . Naturally, I took my courage in both hands, I called on him to surrender, and I made a jump at him to arrest him. . . . Black darkness again, murky as the conscience of a horse-dealer. . . . Then I barked my shin on a bench, and before I could reach him, my man skips behind a pillar, and runs for his life, flying through the Cathedral like a cat. But naturally he was better acquainted with the place than I was, seeing he had been there so much oftener. . . . I picked myself up, and was after him like a shot, and the next minute I was up against the pulpit. . . . Smash! . . ."

"But where was your electric lamp? . . ." put in a young policeman.

Potterat shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, you're young yet, my man. When you come to my age, you'll know that it isn't possible for a man to mount guard, to summon a man to surrender, to charge him, to fall over a bench, to continue the chase, and to light a lamp, even an electric lamp, all in a minute. . . . I couldn't hold the lamp in my hand all night. . . . When one's all alone and in the dark like that, a man wants to have the full use of his hands in case he needs them, and you see, just in the time it would take to get the lamp out of my pocket, turn it right side out, and press the button, the thief would have had time to get

away. . . . Then there's another thing to think of: he is armed, perhaps; very well, you flash your lamp, and expose yourself and your own position, and he lays you out stiff on a bishop's tomb before you can wink. . . ."

"That's true," said Delessert. "These ruffians haven't much respect for human life. You did the right thing. But hadn't you got a revolver?"

Potterat stared at him.

"H'm! . . . How can you, Delessert, ask such a question? . . . I should like to know what you'd have done if you had been there! . . . Do you really think that a man belonging to the National Church would have the heart to fire off revolvers in the Cathedral at two o'clock in the morning, in the place where he was sworn in before the Grand Council? . . . That's the kind of thing a free-thinker might do, perhaps. . . ."

Conscience-stricken, Delessert reddened, and Potterat concluded:

"Never mind, I have done my duty like a decent man. And after all, if I had actually taken the thief, he would have had to be fed and lodged at the expense of the State, that is to say, at our expense, eh? . . . On the other hand, I have put him to flight. By the rate at which he ran, he ought to be over the border by now. . . . And the result is that the boxes are safe for the future, and it has cost us nothing."

This conclusion of the matter was approved by everyone, and they discussed the events of the night afresh.

Potterat had to tell the story all over again at home, his wife clasping her hands and imploring him:

"David! . . . Promise me that you won't do anything of this sort again? . . . You're far too daring! . . . One against three! . . ."

Out in his little garden, the mignonette was coming up rapidly, the roses were holding out their blossoms to



the sun ; the scented verberna, brought from Eglantine Cottage, was putting forth fresh shoots. In the middle of this modest space Potterat, whistling and singing, was planting out some geraniums. It was good to enjoy this feeling of happiness when for two endless nights one had been, as it were, face to face with infinity, in company with the silent dead, brushing against the unseen.

" Well, it's done you good in one way," he said to himself, " those two nights in the Cathedral. You understand better now how to take things in this world. You must pull yourself up, and drive out the sulks, and get back your old good temper. When one has been down into Hades, it's well to be in the sunshine again, even in a barrack. . . ."

That same evening, moved by some inner prompting of spirit, Potterat took the opportunity of his wife's absence to write a short note to the Schmidts.

" . . . We can't spend the rest of our lives," he wrote, " sulking with each other for a slip of the tongue. We're none of us perfect, and everyone's apt to be out of sorts and irritable at times, and to say something that he's sorry for afterwards. If you like to take this as a hint, you may. . . . We shall expect you one of these evenings to have coffee with us. Love to you all. Your father, father-in-law, and grandfather,

" DAVID POTTERAT."

He went out and posted this letter himself, and when he came back and threw himself full length on the sofa in the drawing-room, he heaved a great sigh of satisfaction.

" Well, to-night, anyhow, I'll sleep in my bed. My word ! I'm not yet ready for eternal life ! . . . I'm too fond of the pots and pans, and of my mattress !"

## CHAPTER VI

ONE day Potterat said to his wife:

"After all, we may as well laugh while we can, it's better than frowning any day. . . . And to condemn all these modern inventions leads to nothing but barren protests. . . . Suppose we go to the Cinematograph one of these days? Would you care to? . . . If we like it, we'll go again; if not, well, at any rate, we'll know what we are talking about."

Needless to say, Madame Potterat was delighted.

"Oh yes, let's go, certainly."

So that very evening the husband and wife might have been seen sitting in good places at the Eden-Apollo Theatre. In the seats round about them a world in miniature was represented; South American half-breeds, Englishmen, working men, servants, peasants, gaily dressed and highly perfumed ladies, respectable citizens in white waistcoats. Having shone for some minutes on this heterogeneous assembly, the great lamps suspended from the ceiling were lowered, leaving only a dim, red light. . . . Bob, a comical dwarf, leaped suddenly into the drawing-room on the stage; he hid himself under a sofa, and pinched the calves of the ladies sitting on it; when discovered, he is rolled up in a rug, and thrown into the street from the window of the fourth-floor room where the party is assembled. He falls on the head of a policeman, who passes opportunely at the moment, disappears down a convenient drain-pipe, reappears again through a ventilator, and vanishes in smoke at the very moment when

the excited crowd chasing him is about to seize him. . . . Then followed the story of a beautiful abandoned wife, who makes a tour of the world in her dressing-gown, in search of her faithless spouse, a scoundrel with a sinister forehead. . . . Then some music. . . . Then a hunting scene: the usual pack of hounds with a hundred waving tails: the usual forest path, zig-zagging amongst the birch-trees, the forest clearing, the brilliant moonlight, the rendezvous of the lovers, their kisses, prolonged whilst a gun is noiselessly pushed out from between the gently parted branches of a neighbouring tree. . . . Bang! . . . Bang! . . . And two corpses lie side by side upon the turf. A terrified hind runs across the clearing. The piano plays sad, soft music. . . .

This time it is an instructive film: 'In the Souvenchy Quarries'; . . . perspiring workmen, little trolleys, a blasting operation, a casualty, and the blessing of the dying man by a priest who happens by a lucky chance to be near the spot. . . . Slow music on the piano. . . .

Then came 'Lady Sawlborne, or the Criminal for Love.' . . . Lord Raclaff has been assassinated. Fainting and hysterics of his wife and children, to whom the murder is brusquely announced. The detective with half-closed eyes searches for a clue. . . . And he arrests, not the negress, denounced in an anonymous letter, but the elegant and refined Lady Sawlborne, the most beautiful woman in the County of Kent. . . . In the last act a clean-shaven, ascetic-looking clergyman gives the Communion to her who is about to pay her debt to society. . . . Chopin's 'Funeral March' also expires on the piano.

Greatly affected, the crowd dispersed homewards through the narrow streets, talking over the scenes, each of the young couples endeavouring to reproduce the gestures and romantic attitudes of the lovers under the light of the moon.

"We ought to have come here long ago," said Potterat

to his wife. " Part of it was quite educational, and the whole of it was interesting. It is a revelation of the age, that it is! . . . Now I begin to understand better the folly of the world. . . . These people who jump from the chimneys on to the pavement, these emperors who marry servant-maids, that dismal depressing music the piano plays, those burglars, and people who are killed, and who recover miraculously, all for a mere nothing, those men and beautiful women who embrace each other in public as often as they like, . . . all these things repeated every evening, to the accompaniment of music, must excite young people, must mould their minds, turn upside down everything they have been taught at home or at school, and set them dreaming. . . . Yes. Look at our barrack, for instance, all its different floors, all the different types of people who go up and down those stairs, who squawk, and strum on the piano, who receive and entertain very shady company, those young women without a sou, who paint and powder themselves, and read trashy novels all day; who nibble a leaf or two of salad for dinner, instead of eating a good square meal; and ourselves, too, with our grand drawing-room, our boy and his aeroplanes, we're all, you know, just like the scenes in a cinematograph. . . . We go in and out, we dance, we stamp on the floors, we quarrel, and make it up again, just like the birds in the trees. . . . Yes, I'm glad to have seen all that. . . . I understand things better now. . . . Before, we simply lived . . . now, we're all puppets acting in a cinematograph show. . . ."

In this way, Potterat discovered the world of to-day. From this time onwards, he was to be seen at football matches, at hydroplane and aeroplane displays, at motor races round the Lake, at trial runs of motor-boats on the Lake, bounding over the water like fleas. He went to all these shows somewhat for Carlo's pleasure, but more to satisfy his own ever-growing taste for novelty, for the



surprising, for speed, and always at the bottom of his mind lay the unexpressed thought that some day or other there would be an accident, which would justify him in saying "I told you so!" And he would add, with an indulgent laugh:

"Man has long since spoilt the earth. He is now trying to spoil the water and the air. He pesters the animals, and the fishes, and the birds. . . . The time is coming when one will be able to go out of one's house at a quarter past eight in the morning, and come back at twenty past twelve, having flown right round the world. . . . Our girls and boys will take their Sunday afternoon stroll in Central Africa. . . . Some people think that the world is going to end either by being frozen or by being burnt up, but my own opinion is that at a certain moment we'll all whirl off into space. . . . My word! . . . At the pace we're getting to nowadays, with all this rush, this speed, this emotional excitation by cinematographs and what not, this continual strumming of pianos, the day will come when we shall turn and rend each other, when we shall all, men, women, and children, go mad suddenly, and return to the period of hyenas, monkeys, wild cats. . . . It will be the judgment on extravagance."

To these doleful prophecies, Zimmerli, the old lute-player, would reply placidly:

"Oh, don't excite yourself so much about these people. . . . They don't worry themselves about us. We are old. It's their turn now."

Not far from the little garden, on a piece of waste ground which could be seen through the laurel branches, some urchins were playing football, every now and then clustering in groups like wasps on ripe fruit. Watching them, Potterat was inspired afresh.

"There's a good illustration of modern life for you! . . . When I was a boy, we played hide-and-seek for an hour or two on Sunday afternoons; the rest of the week, it was

school and work. As soon as school was over, we went off with a shovel and barrow along the roads, following the horses. . . . When I tell this to Carlo, he can scarcely believe it. . . . He belongs to a football club, to an Athletic Sports Society, and he's a Boy Scout, and I don't know what all. . . ."

Zimmerli replied very sensibly:

"Well, you can't send boys to gather manure on the roads now, following up motor-cars. . . . And you can't keep children quiet at that age; they must have exercise. . . ."

"Oh, certainly. . . . I agree with you. . . . All I mean is that we, when we were boys, thought of how we could help our parents, but nowadays the young ones seem only to think how much they can get out of us. . . . Except Robert here," and Potterat patted the little lame boy on the cheek. "He is thoughtful; he enjoys the flowers. You'll see that in ten years from now, he'll be better off than all the rest. . . . They're spending all the time . . . he saves what he gets."

By way of a house-warming, Madame Potterat decided to give a tea-party, and in doing so, to establish herself on a higher rung of the social ladder. So one beautiful afternoon in June, Madame Blanc, wife of the head of a department at the 'Paradis des Dames'; Madame Thévenaz, wife of a clerk in the Railway Secretary's office; and Madame Regamey, a contractor's widow, entered the sacred precincts. While they drank tea, and ate little cakes, these good ladies discussed the eternal servant question, and each related her difficulties. A little ashamed, Madame Potterat explained that she only had a woman to come in every morning for the rough work. The others congratulated her on being able to do without 'those wretched servant girls, who spend their time looking out of window, and flirting

with the butcher's boy.' Then they demolished the characters of the two sisters Bienvenue, . . . 'highly disreputable persons!' . . . who had made a moonlight flitting the previous night without paying their rent. . . .

"I saw their flat this morning, for the owner, you know, is a friend of ours," said Madame Thévenaz, "and you never saw such a pigsty! . . . It was simply disgusting. . . . Vegetables decaying in the sink, wisps of hair all over the floors in the bedrooms, and scent-sachets, and dirty powder-puffs. . . . Oh, positively, a pigsty. . . ."

"I'm told that Verret, the tobacconist, has something to do with this hasty departure. . . . It was rather awkward for him to carry on two establishments so near together. . . . His wife told him what she thought of him this morning. . . . They had a terrible scene, I believe. . . ."

"Dear me, how dreadfully sad," said Madame Potterat.

"Oh, Madame! . . . It doesn't do to have too many illusions. . . . Happy homes are none too common. Look at the Berrioz, for instance, divorcing each other. . . . And they say that all is not as it should be with the Ravards. . . . She, with her tastes, you know, ought never to have married a poor clerk. . . ."

"Have they any children?"

"No, fortunately. . . . Really, at the rate one has to live nowadays, it's no joke thinking about settling one's daughters by-and-by. I'm beginning to worry about it already. . . . With sons, it's much easier. . . ."

Some of these mothers looked at each other in dismay, and quickly changed the conversation.

"Have you been to the 'Grand Bazaar Mondial' yet? . . . It's really lovely. . . . You can buy everything there almost. . . . And there is a band. . . . You can have tea, and listen to the music. . . . And you always meet people you know. . . . It's quite charming. . . . I always go there two or three times a week."

Carried away by the descriptions given by these ladies,

Madame Potterat followed the stream of pleasure-seekers, and went to see for herself. And her account of what she saw sounded so attractive that Potterat, in his new mood of worldliness, offered to accompany her next time.

They all went. The moment they entered the swing doors, Carlo stopped short before two Japanese, who, with lightning rapidity, and with the most fascinatingly deft and sure touches of their tiny brushes, were painting storks and chrysanthemums on little paper fans.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Madame Potterat.

"Oh! . . . they have learnt how to do it!" said Carlo, whom nothing surprised.

"The Japanese are like that . . ." said Potterat. "We in Europe have the original ideas, and they turn our ideas to practical account."

To the dreamy strains of dance-music from a band hidden behind some Japanese screens, they drank tea, and ate cakes. Half hypnotized by the smiles of a neighbouring fair one, scarcely scandalized, even, by the very low-necked gowns of some of the fair frequenters of the place, and more than a little proud of being able to hobnob with the fashionable world, Potterat held in the air, suspended on the point of his fork, a piece of cake that would have made anyone but him shudder. And he whispered to his wife:

"Just look at Carlo! . . . how much at ease he is in the middle of all this. . . . By-and-by, when he takes his place in the world, he will be able to bow and scrape with the best of them, like that little shopman there, who bows to his customers at the rate of one a second. . . . That must need some suppleness of the backbone. . . . But if one goes in for that sort of thing, it's as well to do it properly. . . ."

On their way home, they went somewhat out of their way to climb the little hill of Montriond, whence they could see the new quarter of the town, several hotels, twenty-



three pensions, the Vaudois plain, the Jura, the Alps, and, uniting them all, the blue crescent of Leman.

"Do you see our barrack, Carlo? . . ."

"How funny! You can see right into the houses. . . . I see a cook grinding coffee . . . and another washing a saucepan. . . . And how flat the road and the carriages on it look! . . . the people are just like ants swarming about! . . ."

Potterat seized the opportunity to impress upon his son some sense of the relativity of human things.

"Ha! Like ants, that's a very good description. . . . And those people that you see there walking about, that girl in red, that man in a tall hat, that one riding, and all the rest, every one of them thinks himself or herself the most important person in the world. . . . And yet, if the whole lot of them were to die suddenly, this evening at five o'clock, the sun would set just the same as ever in the same place. . . ."

"There's the gong of the Institute," interrupted Madame Potterat.

"No, excuse me. That's the gong at Troblet's. . . . There are fifty-eight pupils there. . . . There, you see! . . . The recreation is just finished. Look at those Egyptians coming out from the bushes. . . . There is the headmaster himself in the doorway . . . he's watching to see that they all come in. . . . See the boys running, big and little . . . there, they're all in! . . . I wonder if they're going to have any more classes? . . . Yes, there you can see through that open window a row of heads and the master giving the lesson. . . . The headmaster goes off now that they are all indoors. . . ."

"How the town is growing! . . ." said Madame Potterat again. "Don't you remember, David, when we were young, the little paths along the lakeside? How pretty it was there! . . . Now it is very grand and handsome, with those fine hotels, and villas, and new houses . . ."

" . . . Which keep the sun from the rest of the world," finished Potterat. " . . . And these houses, how they spring up one after the other, turning their backs on their poorer neighbours, peering from their corner. . . . It looks as if some tipsy giant staggering along had spilt them out of his pack here and there, as the old legend declares, . . . or as if some big whales had run aground here and there on the bank. . . . There's no proportion about them. . . . And never a church tower amongst them, if you notice . . . though there are plenty of turrets on the hotels, monumental railway-stations, and sky-scrapers, as they call them in America. . . . But one never sees a real home being built now, a cottage like Eglantine Cottage, for instance, or a nice modest little house that one could identify oneself with. . . ."

" Poor David ! Why will you waste time in regretting things ! . . . "

" I'm not regretting things. . . . I'm only stating facts. . . . "

By giving utterance to these protests from time to time Potterat tried to maintain a kind of consistency, to assure himself that he was not giving way to the seductions of the modern movement; while all the time, in his enforced idleness, the taste for amusement was growing on him more and more, so that a day without a match, or a race, or some excitement, was beginning to seem to him long, and boring, and dull.

They reached their flat, and here, as always, at the moment of entering, Madame Potterat said:

" Wipe your feet, David. . . . "

" What a silly fuss to make about a few planks just because they happen to have a little beeswax on them ! "

For a moment or two, the couple gazed at each other in astonishment, but by the time they sat down to supper, the little storm in a teacup had blown over. . . . Had they not both the same blue eyes . . . the same

distaste for quarrels? . . . Presently Potterat noticed that his wife had done her hair in a new way, piled high on the top of her head, and leaving the nape of her neck free.

"The devil! . . . Where on earth have you picked up that new fashion?"

"Oh, everybody's doing it like this now. Do you like it?"

"H'm! . . . Well, it's not bad. . . . It certainly makes you look younger. . . . Yesterday, you looked like my wife. This evening you look more like my daughter. I shall have to blacken up my moustache, and dip my head in the tar-bucket. . . . Carlo, you'll have nice new smart parents soon, spruced up, and dressed in the latest fashion. . . . You will scarcely be able to recognize us. . . . We'll have to smarten up, otherwise when you are grown-up, and a managing director of a bank, perhaps, and a freemason, if we were old and shabby and out-of-date, we'd have to be put in a corner somewhere out of sight, wouldn't we? . . ."

"Oh, no! . . . I should buy you a villa. . . . I should give you a motor-car. . . ."

"Ah, how nice! . . . We should be perfectly happy then—with smoked-glass goggles, leather gloves, fur-lined coats, perhaps. . . . 'I say, look at the Potterats!' people would say. 'Aren't they swells?' . . . No, no, my dears! Let's remain the simple people we have always been; let us stick to the old ways, and not ape these new fashions. . . ."

"All the same, father, the other day when we were watching Chevillard looping the loop, you said, 'This is very wonderful, after all!' . . ."

"So I did! . . . One mustn't reject everything just because it's new. . . . When you see a man tumble head over heels in the air away above the Cathedral spire, you can't help shouting 'Bravo!' . . . But to argue

from that that people's brains work better upside down, is another thing altogether. . . ."

"In ten years from now, I bet you I shall be 'looping the loop.'"

"What's that you say? . . ." Potterat gazed at this duckling he had hatched. . . . "You stick to the ground, my boy, it's safer, and one knows where one is. . . ."

In spite of the distractions of their new life, on the first Sunday in every month the Potterat family, as usual, dressed in their best black clothes, came out of No. 5, Avenue des Roses, and betook themselves to church.

"Nobody else here goes to church," grumbled Carlo.

"We go at any rate," said his mother. "Remember, my boy, that God sees and knows everything."

"But the earth is round. How can He see the other side if He's looking at this side?"

This primitive reasoning floored Potterat.

"Round? . . . Are you quite sure of that? . . . In any case, that has nothing to do with our going to church."

Nevertheless, Potterat was rather inclined to agree in his heart with Carlo. It needs a good deal of virtue to make a man sit for a solid hour on a hard bench, without moving a muscle, or yawning.

"But never mind," he thought. "One doesn't go to hear sermons for pleasure. . . . And if one can't always keep one's attention fixed on the sermon, at any rate the preacher's voice is soothing."

At last came the benediction, and once outside again, they enjoyed the sunshine, the gay dresses, the pleasant tinkling of the tram bells. It was no use trying to remember the text of the sermon. Only a pleasant sense of duty done remained in the hearts of these simple people. Soon after, seated round the Sunday dinner-table, sanctified by the ceremony of the morning, Potterat said:



"In this barrack here, I really think they work harder on Sunday mornings than they do all the rest of the week put together. . . . One is ironing her lace and frills, another is putting a new bone in her corset, a third is hammering in nails. . . . This afternoon they'll all be running off to some fête, this evening to the cinema. . . . And then they'll come back about midnight, completely knocked up, and without a sou. . . ."

"These people never think," said Madame Potterat gently, as she ladled out the golden soup into the shining plates.

"All the same," went on Potterat, "there's no doubt that religion, once you begin to get old and grey, gives you a grip on something, you know. . . . You'll find that out, my boy, when you come to seventy. . . . At that age, the only 'looping the loop' a man has a chance of doing is into the next world. . . ."

Sometimes, on Sundays, when he found the squalling of the children on the various balconies rather too much for him, and began to get homesick again, Potterat would go up to town, and lift the blind that hung in front of the doorway to keep out the flies from the old café in the Rue d'Etraz. In the streets, bright splashes of sunlight, the silvery gleam of a flight of pigeons, the dark blue of the shadows: in the little inn, pewter measures wherein glittered cool wine, broad backs bent over the tables, slow, leisurely talking. . . .

When Potterat appeared amongst his friends on this first Sunday in July, 1914, the circle of frequenters opened to receive him. They were talking about their length of service, their approaching retirement, their pensions.

"By the way, what age are you, Potterat? . . . You look just the same always. . . ."

"Always! . . ." replied Potterat, with his usual cordiality. "The framework is sound; I can see to drink

without glasses . . . and I always keep in as good a temper as possible, except on days when everything goes wrong. . . .”

“ It agrees with you, evidently. Your moustache is more pepper than salt still. . . .”

“ My moustache ? . . . Oh, it’s still not a bad one. . . . The young ladies, and even some of the old ones, make eyes at it still sometimes. . . . With the sun shining on it, it would pass for a bit of a straw-rick. . . .”

Such were the harmless jokes and kindly chaff that they exchanged, their elbows on the table, looking out of the corners of their eyes to see how their shafts told. Presently a deeper note was struck, and the assembly began to discuss European politics. Things were not going at all well, it appeared. The heir to a throne had been assassinated. The people were speaking out very freely, raking up old grievances, whilst the diplomatists were doing their best to pour oil on the flames. Sovereigns were already mobilizing God, which is always a bad sign.

“ Each of them thinks he has only to send up marching orders to Heaven, and the game is his. . . .”

“ Take my word for it, God is Swiss. . . . In other words, He is neutral. . . .”

Corbaz, an old man with a hooked nose and thick eyelashes, a man of few words, nudged Potterat in the ribs:

“ Do you know what I think ? I believe that there will be a big explosion just when one least expects it. . . . From Russia to England, my word, every one of them will be at one another’s throats. It’s been simmering, you know. . . . For the last fifty years or so they have been snarling, piling up little injuries, the sharp ones amongst them have been pulling all the strings, flattering some, insulting others, offering clocks or boxes on the ear, as the case might be. . . . Oh yes, there was bound to be a smash-up one of these days. . . .”

Potterat said with immense dignity:

"Well, for us there is only one thing to do; we shall man our frontiers. . . . I'll undertake myself to cover a yard and a half. . . ."

Then there was an explosion of pure patriotism. These good honest men defied emperors, jeered at would-be world-conquerors, invoked their ancestors. They sang their most patriotic songs, 'La Libre Sarine,' 'Au Bord du Rhin,' 'Dieu nous benira,' etc., after which they called for another two litres. . . . Then they traced out plans on the table with their thumb-nails: rivers, mountains, tunnels; they sent out troops along the various roads; they won decisive victories; and altogether had an inspiring time. Pahud gave them his opinion: "As for me, I'm great on flanking movements . . . but you must give me time, because of my shortness of breath. . . . If I had time, I'd fall on them from behind. . . ."

Milliquet put more faith in marksmanship.

"We Swiss *can* shoot, you know. . . . Ten cartridges, eleven men, every time. . . . No, I'm not boasting! I'm talking quite calmly and coolly, and I say we can't be beaten. . . ."

Potterat, too, had his preferences.

"With a 'corporation' like mine," said he, "I shouldn't be exactly the best man for prolonged attacks. . . . But if it's a question of firing from the knee, in a sheltered position, I'm equal to any man in Europe. . . . Or in hand-to-hand fighting I'm all there: you take your rifle by the barrel, and pitch into them for all you're worth . . . you bite and kick and growl, like fighting dogs . . . and when it's all over, you collect the dead in a heap, climb upon them, and mount guard. . . . That's the way. . . . With us, you see, we only fight for liberty, for justice . . . we're on the side of all little oppressed nations. . . . We have a glorious past behind us. . . . We are the freest people in the world. We are the parents of all republics. We founded republicanism . . . and there you are! . . ."

The noise increased. They sang and talked all at once, But Verniaud, the pessimist of the little party, had not yet had his say. Taking advantage of a pause in the uproar, he began:

"My poor friends! . . . This is all very fine! . . . Now just suppose for a minute that war is declared to-day, and that they send their cavalry against us, fifty thousand men, with guns, and Maxims, and infantry coming up behind. . . . Where do you think they'd have got to by nine o'clock in the evening, before we had had time to mobilize, or to fire a single shot? . . . Speed is everything nowadays. . . . I shouldn't be at all surprised if *they* were gathering our grapes this autumn. . . ."

"What do you mean by 'they'?"

"I mean the—— Oh, you know very well!"

"But we are neutral. They can't do anything to us. . . ."

"If ever anyone is trying to murder you, just you try to tell the man with the knife that you are neutral. . . ."

"What about Morat? . . . and Morgarten? . . . and Sempach? . . ." said Corbaz.

"Oh, that's an old story. . . . Battles in those days were a question of muscle . . . and then, too, one had time to turn round, as it were, to choose one's position. . . . But to-day, we have to reckon with railways, aeroplanes, motor-cars, wireless telegraphy. . . . And think of all those tunnels! . . ."

This impressed Corbaz.

"Yes, that's true. . . . I said so long ago. If we're lost, it'll be through those tunnels."

"And through the hotels too. . . ."

"People don't vote any more now. . . . The young men don't care. . . ."

"Ah! . . . We're governed by a lot of lawyers nowadays. . . ."

"Yes, the country is going to the dogs. . . ." said a voice, as they rose from the table. They parted rather silently, shaking their heads, and Potterat said to Delessert:



“ That wet blanket, Verniaud, spoils everything, with his pessimistic talk . . . sending us away gloomy and depressed when we were all aglow ! . . . I must do something to take the taste of it out of my mouth. . . . I know what ! . . . There is some sort of a fête at Ouchy to-night, music and fireworks. I’ll go home and have some supper, and take my wife and the boy out. . . . These are times when a man feels he must do something to keep up his spirits. . . . ”

From eight o’clock onward the tread of many feet resounded on the pavements, still hot from the July sun.

“ Good-bye ! I hope you’ll have a nice time ! ” called out the little cripple from his basement window, as the Potterats filed out after supper.

“ Good-night, dear, good-night, ” replied Madame Potterat. “ What a dreadful existence for that poor child ! Never to go out ! Never to see anything ! . . . ” she added with a sigh.

“ That depends, ” said her husband. “ If war does break out, it’s the cripples will be the lucky ones. . . . Not to mention that in the long-run a boy who is always indoors learns more. . . . Remember that, Carlo. . . . ”

The water of the Lake gleamed softly, reflecting the first stars, for night falls slowly on an exquisite July evening. They paid their franc, and passed through the barrier. Here all was gaiety and merry talk and laughter, pretty frocks, the crunching of the gravel under the passing feet, and the breaking of the waves on the rocks ; away off across the Lake the villages, like bunches of little white onions, nestled amidst their green fields and their vineyards, above which the swallows circled in wide sweeps.

“ What crowds of people ! ” repeated Madame Potterat. “ And how lovely ! . . . perfectly exquisite ! . . . it all looks. A tremendous success. I’m so glad we came. ”

The plump matron carried herself well and gracefully. The roses on her hat trembled on their stalks. On other

women, as gay and smiling as herself, she cast glances of calm equality, or serene superiority.

"Father," said Carlo, "let's hire a little boat?"

"No, certainly not. I don't want to be drowned at night. . . ."

So they sat on the low wall, the warm stone of which overhung the tepid water. Generally, one moon sufficed, but to-night a hundred electric moons shed on the grass lawns, on the bushes, on the gay beflowered hats, that silvery light which seemed to bear with it the muffled strains of a waltz played by invisible musicians.

Potterat felt a touch of sadness as he gazed, half enviously, on the laughing boys and girls round him.

"It's a pity that life should be so like a hill, with people mounting on one side, going down on the other."

The whistle of an ascending rocket cut short his reflections. The long flexible snake-like neck elongated itself, rose to a great height, paused there, then fell down, leaving behind a shower of sparks which were extinguished one by one beside the winking stars. Down on the edge of the Lake, the Venetian lanterns twinkled amongst the trees like oranges, squibs burst amongst the laughing crowds, the band played softly. . . . When a woman passed, dressed apparently in transparent gauze, Potterat said to his son:

"Look up there, Carlo! . . . Everything splendid is carried out on the heights! . . ." Aside to his wife he said:

"Did you see that? . . . Slit-up skirts, stockings like a spider's web, her dress cut so low that it shows the whole of her neck, and openwork here, there, and everywhere! . . . Exposing herself like that . . . just enough to make still greater fools of the fools now going about the world. . . . But some of the young men, nowadays, are just as bad . . . with their long hair, their open shirt fronts showing their chests, their necklaces, their bracelets. . . . I tell you what, if this sort of thing had been going on when I was in the Police, I should have

brought them all to the police-station to give an account of themselves. . . . Oh yes, there's not a doubt of it, the time is ripe for war. The world is growing decadent. If people try to live standing on their heads, they're very likely to wake up and find themselves sitting in the fire. . . . Come along and listen to the band. . . ."

The conductor, a short, thick-set man, with a red face, led his circle of shining instruments with sweeping gestures.

"Ah, there's no one like him for bringing out the lilt of a waltz. . . ."

"He must be pretty old ! . . ." said Madame Potterats

"Old ! . . . Not a bit of it ! My own age, that's all. . . . He's a fine conductor. . . . I like the things he choose. too, those pieces where the air comes out strong and clear amongst the runs and shakes, and finishes up in the end clean and smart, with one big major chord. . . ."

When the last firework had rushed up into the sky, the musicians methodically emptied out the tubes of their instruments, and packed away their music-stands. The lamps began to go out, and men were taking down the strings of Venetian lanterns. In the sky, which suddenly seemed much darker, the stars shone out more brightly, as if taking heart again. And young couples strolled along in the damp heat of that airless night, in the languor which succeeds excitement. . . .

"To keep in good health the best of all ways  
Is in frolic and laughter to spend our days,"

yelled a party installed on the terrace of a café.

"Just listen to that !" murmured Potterat. "Well, William's going to give them all some fun presently. . . . After all, if it's a question of dying of war, or dying of luxury, one might as well die of war. Let them all come ! . . ."

"Come, David ! Think of the fête, instead of all these dismal things. . . ."

" Ah, those who see clearly what's coming are always told they're cracked. . . . Wait until the crash comes ! . . . This fête gives me a funny sort of feeling, you know. . . . "

" Hallo, Potterat ! . . . Good-evening, Madame ! "

They turned and saw Bigarreau.

" Well, how goes it, David ? "

" Oh, pretty well on the whole. I'm glad to see you. I like the fellows who wear the gloves the sun gives them. . . . Have you seen anyone else you know here to-night ? "

" Good Heavens, no ! . . . In this neighbourhood, I'm as lost as—I don't know what ! It's a foreign land to me. "

" Do you remember it thirty years ago ? . . . When the women used to pick their mattresses out on the road, and the cats used to come and lie in the middle of them. Everybody one met used the speech of the country, a friendly speech. . . . Those were good times. . . . One turned sometimes to look at an extra fine man, but not to look at petticoats. . . . Nowadays, it is the triumph of Eve. . . . At eight years old, even, they begin to make eyes ! . . . I heard one slip of a girl the other day saying to another one, and by way of a compliment too, if you please, ' You look like a foreigner ! ' . . . And mothers nowadays give their children names that are enough to make them go to the bad: Roxane Tauxe, Edmée Petoud, Odette Truquet, Jacqueline Petermann. . . . At fifteen the girls think they can do as they like, and at sixteen they run about the streets in gowns that you can see through. . . . My opinion is that there is a thorn in the heart of the century. . . . And the worst thing about all these shows we are constantly seeing is, that everyone is more or less coarsened by them, becomes more like a pig. . . . Don't you think so, Bigarreau ? "

" Don't run down pigs. . . . They may be a bit dirty in their habits, but anyhow, they don't cheat you, they don't lie, they don't steal. At heart they're quite decent. They are pigs, and nothing else . . . but man is that, and something more. . . . "



By this time they had reached No. 5, Avenue des Roses. Up on a window-sill, a cat sat, mewing piteously.

"What's the matter, Minon? . . . Are you wondering at the ways of the world? . . . It'll be a long time before you can understand them."

"Oh look, David!" said Madame Potterat once more, before putting the key into the lock. "What crowds of people are going up to town! . . ."

"Oh, all right! All right! . . . As if one hadn't seen more than enough of these people! . . . Oh, we're going to have a nice peaceful night, I can see; the gramophones braying at the café, lovers promenading about, drunkards. . . . If we keep the windows closed, we shall be stifled: if we open them, we might as well be in the street. . . ."

In the square, a band of young men were howling with savage energy:

"Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!" . . .

"Ho, yes! . . . The Vaudois people are getting scarce about here. . . . Very soon, we shall be going about, no doubt, with labels on our backs: 'Old Swiss. Rare specimens. Please do not touch.' . . . Ah well! . . . Good-night, Bigarreau. . . ."

They shook hands and were just going in when Madame Potterat gave a cry of alarm:

"Where's Carlo? . . ."

"Carlo! . . . He was here just now. He must have run out again to see some of those foreigners who are yelling those horrible songs. . . . At the least thing he's off like a shot, and if one didn't look after him, he wouldn't come home till four o'clock in the morning. . . . H'm, yes! . . . The clergyman says in church, when one is getting married: 'May God send you the blessing of children!' . . . My word! . . . A nice sort of blessing! . . . I should say rather 'Blessed are the barren!' . . ."

## CHAPTER VII

ON market days the Potterats went shopping together. They bought vegetables and fruit from their old friends Bigarreau and Burnand. On the 1st August, Potterat, holding fast gallantly to the biggest basket, left his wife for a little while to go and see his old chum Corbaz, who had retired, after forty years of office life, to a little flat in the Palud, where he struggled with his gout. They had pushed the invalid's chair up to the open window, which overlooked the Place de la Palud, a gay and bustling scene.

"The flag is flying from the tower of the Town Hall in honour of the National Fête," explained Potterat. "It looks fine against the blue of the sky."

"Yes," replied Corbaz. "By the way, the news to-day is not very good. Have you read it? . . ."

Just then from the Place, fragrant with the smell of fresh raspberries, rose the sound of a rapidly beaten drum, a sound which had something menacing in it. Immediately the market was in a state of commotion; there was a swift mingling of many colours, as green hats, blue jackets, and grey suits rushed together like a swarm of ants, all quivering with excitement. The seed merchant left his stall to take care of itself, the seller of cream cheeses forsook his red umbrella . . . all were closely clustered round the drum. Now from the heart of the crowd a voice began to intone.

"What does he say? . . ." asked the old man, raising himself on the arms of his chair. Leaning out of the window, Potterat watched the crowd, as one watches

the happening of some terrible thing one has often foretold, only half believing it, and which suddenly comes to pass. Never before had he seen his country-people preserve such a tragic silence.

"What is it? What's the matter? . . ." cried Potterat from the window. A man looked up with a stupefied face.

"War! . . . We're called out! . . ."

Potterat repeated: "War! . . . We're called out! . . ."

Terrified, his hands still convulsively clasping the arms of his chair, Corbaz gazed fixedly at the clock of the Town Hall, with its brown hands, its golden figures, the dial he had so often consulted. That dial he now, in fancy, saw demolished, in ruins, as if by a lightning stroke. And Corbaz repeated in his turn:

"War! . . . They're called up? . . . What? . . ."

In the houses opposite people were leaning from their windows, a tailor, with his iron still in his hand, from one, an old toothless woman from another, a cook from a third, some children, the notary, with his pen behind his ear, Madame Gindroz, the butcher's wife, with her crimson face, and her tie of a different red. All these shouted up to Potterat:

"War! . . . It's war! . . . We're called up!" . . .

"Not you! . . ." shouted Potterat to the butcher's wife with a sort of impatience; then seizing the basket where sea-kale, lettuces, plums, lay side by side, and leaving Corbaz trying to rise from his chair, he flew down the narrow tortuous stairs, and mingled with the crowd.

"Are they already in Switzerland? . . . Where are they? . . ." he asked. The crowd surged backwards and forwards, and everyone asked questions which no one could answer.

"But doesn't anyone know anything?"

"What do you want to know?"

"Have they wired from Berne? . . ."

"Nobody seems to know. . . . But anyhow the order is to mobilize. Elite, Landwehr, Landsturm, . . . everybody's to go. . . ."

"Then they must have invaded Switzerland. . . ."

"I shouldn't wonder. . . ."

It takes only a moment to go from peace to war. How trivial these baskets of vegetables and fruit seemed now. . . . Swept backward by an eddy of the crowd, a man sat down in one of them . . . and nobody laughed. And one poor woman, with her hands on her hips, her bonnet tilted over one ear, kept on monotonously repeating:

"Good God! . . . All to go! . . . I have four sons of military age! . . ."

A motor-car forced its way through the crowd. In it sat some staff officers, their heads close together, evidently discussing the situation with each other.

"That's Bornand! . . ."

Then some younger men passed, running as if to put out a fire. Everywhere men came out of their houses, approached strangers, and clustered in groups in the cross-roads. Already at one window, an artillery uniform was spread out on the sill to air. . . . The crowd grew more and more excited; they shouted and gesticulated, and uttered big threats against the enemy. But there was gloom in every heart. Something turned like a millwheel in their heads, legs trembled and grew weak, hands felt like lead, and a throbbing of the arms told of the quick rush of blood to the heart. Emptying a basket of spinach on the ground, one woman explained to the crowd at large, none of whom took the slightest notice of her:

"I'm throwing it away, that spinach. . . . If there's been one foot, there have been thirty in that basket. . . . What good is it after that? . . . Besides, it's war! . . ."

Madame Potterat sat, her hands spread out on her lap, and regarded her husband with wide frightened eyes.



"War! . . ." she murmured. "War! . . ."

On the wall opposite, the deer was still quenching its thirst at the brook in the peaceful woodland glade, on the floor the new carpet still shone in multi-coloured splendour. Round the table stood the five armchairs. . . . A little peaceful interior. . . . Tragically Potterat groaned:

"Well, well! . . . There's your fine drawing-room in the soup! . . ."

As she moved about among her saucepans later, she said, sprinkling sugar, instead of salt, over the cutlets:

"Was it worth while breaking my back with hard work over it? . . . and selling our land, and putting our money in the bank? . . . What will happen to it? . . . They'll take everything! . . . This afternoon I'll collect all our silver and good things, and take them to Aunt Françoise at Romainmotier. They'll never find them in that out-of-the-way corner. . . . Oh, good gracious! . . . There, I've sugared the meat! . . . Oh well, I can't help it! . . . In any case, nobody wants to eat anything! . . ."

"On the contrary," protested Potterat. "This is just the time that one wants to keep up one's strength. . . . *Mon Dieu!* Think of all those big guns, and mitrail-leuses; all those rifles and bayonets which are longing to begin their work! . . . How many of those who eat their dinner to-day will perhaps be dead to-morrow? . . . War was bound to come . . . the madness of the world was past all bounds . . . the rottenness was beginning to stink. . . . We were getting too soft, too wrapped up in cotton wool. Now we'll have to lie on the hard ground, often with an empty stomach, and to call up our courage from our boots if necessary. . . ."

"To lie on the hard ground? . . ."

"Well, how do we know what may happen! . . . Russia, Germany, Austria, Montenegro, Serbia, France, England. . . . Three hundred millions of people firing at each other over our heads, and we in the middle of them!

Do you imagine that we shall be left long quietly in our beds? . . . I bet you it won't be more than a week or so, before the enemy will be marching past our windows. . . . And if so, I'll establish myself in the cellar, and wipe out everyone who comes within range. . . ."

"For goodness' sake, be quiet, David! . . . Suppose somebody heard you! . . . There's one of them on the floor above. . . ."

"Who? . . . Schneegans? . . . Let him just say a word, and I'll soon send him to the floor below. . . . For the present, anyhow, we can do what we like in our own house, I hope. . . ."

Everyone was in a state of excitement. People flew out on their balconies, and in again, as if some insect had stung them. A voice called out from a fourth-floor window:

"Monsieur Potterat! . . . Monsieur Potterat! . . . If it should become necessary, may we bury our silver in your garden? . . ."

"Oh, certainly, Madame, certainly. . . . Only they'll know everything about it. . . . There are spies on every side. . . ."

In the Square outside, people eagerly snatched from the newsboy the papers, still damp from the press.

"Well," someone said, "as long as France keeps quiet there is some hope. . . . There she is with her Caillaux business. . . . She'll give in again, no doubt. . . ."

A rumour went round that some French Customs officers and a detachment of German dragoons had had a scrap close to the Swiss frontier: a dozen or so killed. . . . Throughout the whole of France, from the Vosges to the Pyrenees, the tocsin was sounding. Some millions of men, already, had set out to the sound of their bugles.

"I don't like the look of things at all! . . ." said Potterat. "We are surrounded on all sides. Well, at any rate, we'll die standing! . . . To-morrow, I shall enroll

myself. . . . Thirty years in the Police ! . . . One's pretty well accustomed to war. . . . To begin with, if I meet anyone who stares at me too impudently, I'll run his head into the nearest drain. . . ."

"Do be quiet, David ! . . ."

"I won't be quiet ! . . . Why should I ? I was only making a remark. Surely a man's got a right to do that ! . . ."

He went out, and presently met some of his acquaintances.

"Things are getting hot, eh ? . . ."

"Nearly cooked, I should say. . . ."

"What a good thing it is that we are neutral !" said another, with a soft voice. "Our territory is protected by treaty from invasion."

"Poor fellow ! . . . Treaties indeed ! . . . These big nations make treaties all right, but if a moment comes when they are inconvenient they squash them. . . . They're only dodges to put us to sleep. . . . No, if you want to be let alone, fix your bayonet, and put a couple of hundred cartridges in your belt. . . ."

The big space in front of the railway-station, guarded by elderly Landsturm men, in full uniform, was packed with an immense crowd. Potterat, clutching a parcel in both arms, was jostled and pushed here and there by the crowd.

"This is for my son, the bank manager, and for my son-in-law . . ." he told someone.

But would it ever be possible to find a son in such a crowd, or a son-in-law either ? Not to mention that men in uniform look so very much alike. . . . There was a sudden move forward, some shouts, and a wave of people pushing each other back. Women and children began to scream, but a way had to be made for the soldiers, who came marching along, with their square knapsacks

on their backs, the straps crossed on their broad chests. Strong odours of leather, of naphthaline, of camphor, floated in the wake of these knapsacks. What fine fellows they looked with their great hands and feet, their tanned faces, and red-brown necks. A blazing sun made stars on the peaks of their caps, as their hob-nailed boots crunched the gravel, some of them laughing to hide their emotion. . . . In the station entrance hall another crowd of people awaited them, trains were drawn up at all the platforms, and presently every door and window was blocked with heads, and showed the sparkle of bright buttons on the blue and green uniforms, and the spots of colour which were faces. And on the platforms women young and old, children, all those who were being left behind. . . . Will they ever come back, these dear soldiers? . . . They looked at each other in silence, reading in each other's eyes the hidden thoughts, the love and devotion of this sacred hour. Potterat listened to the various noises of singing, of shunting carriages, the panting of engines, short quick words of command, all the bustle and noise of battle, already, and he thought of the willing sacrifice. . . .

In the front row of the crowd stood a little woman with a gaily flowered hat; in her arms a baby nestled in its laces. Suddenly a big artilleryman leaped down from the train and folded them in his arms, his tall head bent so low that his képi was hidden under the brim of the rose-wreathed hat. They clung to each other as if it were their last good-bye.

"Hallo, Gunner!" shouted a voice. "We're off! . . ."

The big soldier went off without looking back.

"There is a parting such as one never sees on the stage," thought Potterat.

As a cripple passed, his crutches tap-tapping on the pavement, a soldier said:

"That's what we shall be like in a few weeks' time."



No one replied. They were already inured to tragedy. Fate had them in its grip. Moved to the heart, Potterat rushed up to the train.

"Look here, my boys," he said, "this parcel was for my son and my son-in-law, but in this crush how am I ever going to find them? . . . Here you are, if you'll have it! . . . There are sausages and ham, a bottle of wine, and some pears. . . . Eat all you can, that's the way to keep your heart up. . . . Good luck to you all! . . . And if you have to hit, hit hard! . . ."

"Oh, we'll hit! . . ." grimly replied the man who had taken the packet.

Happy in this little act of good comradeship, Potterat was walking along the train when he caught sight of his daughter Louise, his little grandson, and in front of them at the door of the carriage, the surly, honest face of his son-in-law, Justin Schmid, which seemed to have lost much of its individuality under the képi. Forgetting altogether in the emotion of the moment that Schmid had never replied to his conciliatory letter, Potterat rushed up to them.

"I had a parcel for you and for Ernest. . . . I hunted everywhere, and couldn't find either of you, and the train's just going out, so I gave it away. . . . You must take the will for the deed now. . . . What a pity! . . . There was ham, and sausages, and pears, and a bottle of good wine. . . . I was hoping that you would have eaten and drunk them in the spirit of reconciliation. From to-day there are no longer German-Swiss and French-Swiss. . . . We are all the same . . . all fighting under one flag, isn't that so? . . ."

Louise smiled at her father, and slowly Justin's gaunt face lit up.

"I'm very glad to have seen you. . . . Look after Louise a bit while I'm away, won't you? I'm leaving her in rather a mess, I'm afraid. . . ."

"That's all right, we'll look after her. . . . Those who stay behind must help each other to keep things going. . . ."

The two men exchanged a long and silent handshake. . . . There was a whistle, a fresh outburst of noise. . . . What can two people say to each other at such a moment? Which needed the greater strength? Which felt the parting most? Those who were going off to meet the unknown, their past lives and daily habits cast completely aside for the moment, with the putting on of the soldier's knapsack; or those who would return to their homes to live in continual anxiety because of this strong tie of discipline and silence which has drawn away the others? . . . As for the soldiers, some were singing, some laughing, some shouted more or less foolish jokes, their way of expressing their emotion; others, again, stood grave and silent, drinking in, as it were, the last details of the scene, the vision of the crowd, waving of handkerchiefs; a shiver seemed to pass over them. One saw all mouths open, though no coherent words were uttered; tears stood in all eyes, and one could guess the thoughts behind them, the sympathy, the longing to give help and courage. Then with one accord all the soldiers rose to their feet, waving their rifles above their heads; some of them had fixed their bayonets also; and a song sprang from thousands of throats, and rolled and swelled: "*Sois heureux, sois heureux, O mon pays!* . . ."

"Good-bye, Ernest, good luck! . . . Let them have it! . . ." shouted Potterat, catching sight of his son just as the train glided slowly out of the station; then with his fist he dashed away his tears as he watched it disappear in the distance.

"He didn't see me. . . . He was singing. . . . It doesn't matter; I'm glad to have seen him. . . . I'm giving one son, at any rate, to the country. . . . Good God! What a thing war is! . . . and to think one can't go because one's too old! . . . Well, I suppose I must go back to

that barrack. . . . I'm played out ! . . . I've done my bit in my time, but now we old ones are scrapped, out of date, prehistoric. . . ."

The station square was quiet now; the August sun poured down on the dust. There was much to think of at home. What is the best thing to do when one's country is blockaded, isolated, and when almost everything in the way of food, everything good, comes from abroad? In a sort of panic Madame Potterat went through her store-cupboards. Some pounds of sugar, of flour, of macaroni, a packet of chocolate, some haricots and dried peas, etc., . . . not more than enough to go on with for about a couple of weeks. They must lay in some stores. But to buy anything it was necessary to have some small change; Potterat ran over to the hairdresser's with a couple of bank-notes for a hundred francs each. No change! He went to the greengrocer's, to the tobacconist's, to ten tobacconists', and twenty cafés, and everywhere it was the same. . . . "Change a note? Absolutely impossible! . . ."

It began to rain as Potterat, tired out, took his place in a long queue of people waiting outside the Cantonal Bank. They moved forward at the rate of ten steps in a quarter of an hour. The drippings from umbrellas trickled down people's necks; there was a certain amount of scuffling and wrangling.

"Can't you look what you're doing? . . ."

"What are you shoving for? . . ."

"You're shoving too!"

"Well, you stepped on my feet!"

When at last, at about ten minutes to eleven, Potterat had reached the bank counter, and had recognized his friend Boulenaz behind the grille, he felt all right.

"How d'ye do, Boulenaz? . . . What a crush! . . . There are people from here to Montbenon almost. . . ."

Nervous and overwrought, Boulenaz snapped out:

"I've no time to talk to-day. . . ."

"Oh, all right! . . . Give me change, please, for these two hundred-franc notes. . . ."

"We are only changing fifty-franc notes."

"Go on! . . . What are you talking about? . . ."

"Those are the orders. . . . Fifty-franc notes only. . . ."

"Damn it all! . . . Are you going to starve the whole population? . . ."

"No need for anyone to starve who has fifty francs. . . ."

Sticking to his point, though with inward qualms, Potterat repeated:

"Boulenaz, don't be an idiot! . . ."

Boulenaz threw a hasty glance round and pushed over to him twenty five-franc pieces, hiding them under his hand.

"There you are. . . . Don't tell anyone. . . . Next, please! . . . 'Change a thousand-franc note?' Impossible! Absolutely impossible! Fifty . . . not a franc more!"

"But I was told. . . ."

"Fifty! . . . Next, please!"

Madame Potterat had impressed upon her husband that on his way back he was to buy all he could in the way of provisions. "Never mind what it is," she said, "as long as we can eat it." So he took his place in another queue outside a grocer's shop. The police were lining up the people in twos, old men, children, stout matrons, all armed with receptacles of one sort or another—bags, baskets, fruit panniers, empty boxes, etc. Here again there was a certain amount of squabbling.

"Keep your place, there! . . . I'm before you! . . ."

"I've a family of ten at home. . . ."

"I can't help that! . . . I'm sorry, but everyone has his rights! . . ."

"Don't shove like that! . . . Such manners!"

"That's all right. I wasn't talking to you! . . ."



When Potterat returned, out of breath, with about four pounds of macaroni, and the news that the shops were besieged, his wife sat down overcome with fright.

"They say that the Italians are called out too," she said. "One of the clerks at the railway told Madame Bosset this morning. We are surrounded. We shall die of hunger."

Potterat himself was rather depressed.

"My word! It isn't a nice outlook! . . . I'll tell you what we'll do! 'Little streams feed great rivers.' . . . We'll each go different ways, you and I and Carlo, and we'll buy what we can, each of us. . . . Then we'll bring back what we've got, and start again. . . . You'll see how we shall be received! like dogs. Nobody wants your custom now."

At half-past two, therefore, Carlo set out with a basket; at three o'clock his mother went off, with a rush basket on her arm; finally Potterat emerged, with a string bag in his hand, and another in his coat pocket. And lo, from every door were coming out people with baskets, with wallets, with string bags. They glanced at each others' receptacles, evidently with disapproval of the more capacious ones. Steadily, smilingly, Potterat bore the glances thrown upon him. He seemed to say, "Yes, it's Potterat. . . . I have devoted myself for thirty years to protecting the public. I have a good right now to claim my share of nourishment . . . and there's a good deal of me to be nourished."

The better-known groceries displayed the one word 'Closed!' without any further explanations. They had rolled down the iron shutters, and the proprietor appeared at an upstairs window of one shop to shout to the crowd which still persisted in knocking at the closed doors:

"It's no use knocking! . . . I'm sold out!"

"I'm not such a fool!" thought Potterat to himself.

"I'll go to some of the small shops in outlying districts. . . ."

But there also there were the same crowds of bare-headed women, who regarded this big man, an obvious stranger to the neighbourhood, with no very great favour.

"Some people have cheek," said someone in a loud voice.

"We belong to the same country, Madame," replied Potterat quite gently. "I pay my taxes, I have a son and a son-in-law at the front. Under these circumstances, I think I have a perfect right to look after myself. . . . I'm not asking for any more than my share. . . . It's the Boches who are to blame for all this, and not the French. . . ."

The vicious emphasis he laid on the word 'Boche' showed a somewhat scant regard for the convention of neutrality. This way of looking at the matter appealed to the crowd.

"To bring about such a war as this . . . in the twentieth century! . . ." said one.

"Well, God has a good excuse for sending down his lightnings on them now! . . ." said another.

"To kill millions of men . . . why? . . . My God, why? . . . If an ordinary man commits murder, he is hanged for it. Then what ought to be the punishment for those who have organized this massacre? . . ."

"To let them sit for thirty-two thousand years upon a high current electric wire! . . ." said Potterat, turning to the grocer's wife, a fat woman with flaxen hair.

"My wife sent me," he explained. "'Go where you like,' she said to me, 'but don't come back without some food.' . . . And I had to obey her. . . . If these other ladies object very much, I must give in, but really my wife didn't know where to turn . . . and I have been trying to get something for more than an hour. . . . Everywhere I go it is the same thing. . . . My word, we are having a nice time! . . ."

"And what about me, I should like to know!" interrupted a woman. "My husband has had to go off to the frontier, and I am left with five children to feed and look after . . . and fine appetites they have, too!" And shaking one of the five by the shoulder, she added: "Do you hear? You mustn't come worrying the life out of me for halfpennies any more. . . . I say, do you think this war is going to last very long? . . ."

"My word! I couldn't tell you. . . . But there are something like ten millions of men to kill. With the best will in the world, that'll take some time. . . . A kicking horse is a nasty brute, but I ask you, what sort of a man is it who lets loose on the world such a war as this? . . ."

"You're quite right, Monsieur," said the grocer's wife.

Potterat walked off in triumph with ten pounds of rice.

Encouraged by his success here, Potterat penetrated by a private door into another shop where a shopman was throwing packets about apparently at random amongst the crowd. The proprietor of the shop, a thin little man, overwrought and irritable, in shabby slippers, was shouting at regular intervals: "If everybody speaks at once, we shall never get finished. . . . Hi! you big fellow there! What do you want?" The 'big fellow' addressed was Potterat. As soon as he had been served with six pounds of semolina, he asked for some macaroni. . . . "No, no, it's no use, the next one! . . ." Outside, there was a pushing, shoving mass of people with downcast faces, and again angry glances were thrown on full baskets by the owners of empty ones.

When Potterat returned, proudly laden with his sixteen pounds of foodstuffs, his wife was lying down.

"I'm simply dead tired! . . ." she said. "I've been to eight shops, and I couldn't get anything at any of them."

"And you, Carlo? What luck?"

Proudly, the boy exhibited a thick parcel—twelve pounds of chocolate.

"They told me this was very nourishing. . . ."

Potterat felt himself truly the head of the family, responsible for their welfare.

"Don't worry! . . . To-morrow morning I'll do another round. . . ."

The next day, he betook himself to the shop of a seedsman, with whom they had dealt for some years for their fowl food, etc. But what a change! Where formerly there had been pleasant faces, and rows of neat drawers, now all was confusion, and two men, one red and the other pale, gesticulated wildly, both trying to talk at once.

"Maize? . . . Neither for gold nor silver. . . . We have nothing left. . . . Absolutely sold out. . . . The hotels, you see, the hotels have bought up everything. . . ."

"The hotels! . . . Oh'o! So you're feeding the foreigners, hey? . . . And what about the Vaudois? . . ."

"One hasn't time to ask for birth certificates."

"You recognize me, however. . . . I don't look like a Brazilian, do I?"

"Certainly not, but all the same, I can't make maize out of wood. Good Heavens! We've had such a time of it here for the last two days. . . . If it goes on much longer we'll be in the asylum, and half the population too. . . ."

The question was where to search. . . . He went to Allaz, the grocer's. 'Closed.' On to the old baker's at the-corner.

"Have you any flour?"

The old woman went into the store at the back of the shop, but in a moment she rushed back again, like a frightened wasp.

"Good Heavens! The baker tells me that they have got across the Rhine . . . that they are fighting near Schaffhausen. That their cavalry are at Zurich! . . ."

"Really! You don't say so! . . . Well, give me the flour, please. . . ."

"I can only give you four pounds. You'll have to make that last. . . . It's all I've got. . . ."



She cut the string of the parcel with a sharp snap, and cast a glassy eye on the clock.

"Some people say that the French are at Vallorbe, and that to-morrow they'll be at Lausanne. . . ."

"At Vallorbe? . . . Do you really think they can get across the Jura as easily as one climbs a fence? . . . Who told you that? . . ."

"A lady."

"Tell her to go and put on a plaster. It's the Belgians they're walking over. . . ."

"Oh, that's not so bad!"

"You see, I've been thirty years in the Police, and I know pretty well what's going on."

"Oh, thank you, sir. You have relieved my mind a lot. . . . Really, I scarcely know what I'm doing. And people are so trying. Just now a lady asked me if my rolls were quite fresh. I said to her, 'Madame, go and ask the Germans if my rolls are fresh.'"

Moreover, the prevailing anxiety and irritability affected even the people in their own homes. When night fell, drawing its veil of sombre mystery over the world, Madame Potterat closed the shutters. In the courtyard below, some little rascals were playing at war, bands of them rushing wildly about, shouting "Here they are! Bang! Bang!"

"I simply can't stand it!" moaned Madame Potterat.

Potterat opened a window, and the shutters:

"Carlo! . . . Stop those silly games at once. They upset your mother. Ha! There's someone ringing. Who can it be at this hour?"

"Oh, don't open, David! . . ."

"What? . . . Nonsense! A man who can spend the night in the Cathedral isn't afraid of anything. . . ."

It was the little grocer with the down-at-heel slippers. He threw some packets on the table in the kitchen, and went off again without a word, his mouth open, forgetting to close the door after him.

" Another ten pounds of vermicelli and six pounds of rice. . . . Good ! We are all right. . . . But how hot it is to-night ! . . . Open that window again for a bit. . . ."

" Oh no, David, I beg of you. . . ."

" Oh well, then, I'll go outside. . . ."

Potterat paced up and down his little garden a hundred times and more. A cat fled through the bushes. The full moon shed its blue light on everything. Down under the orchard trees, some paths shone silvery in the moonlight, others lay in shadow; over all was the indefinable sadness of safety trembling on the verge of tragedy. . . . The whistle of a newspaper boy broke the silence. . . . Standing on the pavement, Potterat read: 'Hamburg bombarded by the British Fleet!' He gave a sigh. " Well, that's something done !"

Some days later, towards the end of the afternoon, Potterat said:

" It's as hot in here as if one were sitting on a stove. Suppose we go out for a little while, and get aired !"

They walked down to the Lake by a narrow path. The sun was setting in a red glow: the Lake, no longer dotted with gay, beflagged little boats, slept under the calm of the summer evening. On the other side of the water lay Savoy.

" Just to think of what may be happening on the other side of the Lake !" said Potterat. " Here the men have gone out; they are ready for anything and everything, but still they are waiting. . . . Over there it's a fiery furnace. . . . Many of these Savoyards have already fallen. Their wives may reap and rake and mow: but in vain will they watch the turning of the road to see their husbands come home again. . . . This lovely evening, that beautiful sunset sky, this corner, so like a Paradise of peace, all this must make them sick at heart. . . . Don't you think so ?"

" Who knows ? . . ." said Madame Potterat, a little

ashamed. "Perhaps they are taking it all more calmly than we are."

"Upon my word! . . . We *do* seem to have rather lost our heads these first days."

"Is it any wonder? . . . It was so absolutely unexpected."

"That's where we were wrong. We know what men are . . . we ought to have been more wide awake. On the surface there's a lot of talk about peace and harmony, brotherhood, the good God, and all that sort of thing; but in reality it's roguery, selfishness, war, atrocities. War is everywhere; under the leaves, in the sky, underground, and in the hearts of people. Things may look peaceful outwardly, but underneath there is always war. . . . Cats eat birds, the birds eat caterpillars, the caterpillars eat leaves, the leaves overshadow and kill the plants. . . . I have long felt that we were sleeping on the edge of a precipice. . . . There were some among us who sang the *Ranz des Vaches*. . . . But there were also those who were undermining their neighbours, dabbling in foreign shares, those who are so much for economic progress that in the end the heart is subject to the purse. The people feel that. But even the people are spoilt nowadays with luxury. The days are gone when we rushed to our frontiers for a mere nothing . . . when we stood up to kings and emperors. To-day they present us with clocks and with photographs, and that keeps us quiet. Nevertheless, there's this poor little Belgium, a neutral country like ourselves, as peace-loving as we are, gutted and devastated. . . ."

"Oh, David, do be quiet!" implored Madame Potterat, pointing with her umbrella to a clump of acacias which were quivering in the Lake breeze. "Suppose there should be one of them there! . . ."

Potterat brandished his cane.

"One what? . . . One of which? . . . If he doesn't like what I say, let him come out here! I'll soon shove him

into the Lake ! What the blazes ! . . . This is Switzerland ! . . . we are free ! To violate a treaty ! To pillage and murder an innocent people ! . . . No one in the world, no one, will hinder me from calling that a low-down, dirty trick. . . . Do you hear ? . . . No one ! . . . Damn it all ! . . . ”

“ I agree with you on the whole. But all the same one doesn't know everything. And besides, we are neutral. It is no business of ours. ”

“ That's a heathen sort of sentiment, ” replied Potterat. “ In that case what good is your religion ? . . . What is the use of churches, and schools, of patriotic addresses at our annual trainings, of our national motto : ‘ One for all, all for one ! ’ ? . . . Do we mean a word of it all, or don't we ? . . . Are we utter hypocrites or not ? Tell me that. . . . Are the words justice, liberty, brotherhood, humanity, mere bluff and humbug ? . . . In the Police I was always taught to arrest thieves, to handcuff murderers, and to inform at once on those who tampered with contracts. It is a good rule, and it holds just as good for international affairs. We've got to decide whether we're going to uphold robbery or not. . . . When a little peaceful people calls for help, it's no time for diplomatic quibbling. . . . I have never learnt that our Saviour said on the Cross : ‘ Justice stops at the frontiers, this is the first and great commandment. ’ ”

“ Father, ” said Carlo, “ what does it mean to be neutral ? ”

“ My dear, ask me in what year the world was made ! Neutrality is a sort of labyrinth ; you go in, but you can't come out again. A month ago you were neutral, but you didn't know it. Neutrality is like growing old ; you don't notice it until a day comes when you want to jump or climb somewhere, and you find you can't do it because your joints are stiff. ”

“ I don't understand it at all. ”

“ Well, it's like this : Suppose there is a stable, with



some bulls, some horses and mules, and two sheep in it. Naturally, the big animals quarrel with each other, bite and kick and horn each other. My word! If the sheep get a rap by mistake, they pretend to think that it came from somewhere else. In other words, they profess themselves neutral. In their hearts they have their own opinion, but since it is dangerous to express it openly, they pretend to take no notice; they bleat out all sorts of nice polite speeches, they ring their little bells. They are just good little beasts who take care to keep very close to the walls. . . . Now, suppose the bull declares one evening that because he has grown so fat he must have more room. He puts his head down and charges. The wood flies in splinters, and blood spurts out against the wall. It was the horse he meant to go for, but one of the sheep happened to be in the way, and zip! . . . the poor thing is ripped up with one blow of the horn. Now what do you think the other sheep ought to do? . . ."

"I should think he would bleat with rage. . . ."

"But then he would no longer be neutral."

"Oh, then does being neutral mean that one is to take everything lying down?"

"I don't know. . . . I can't understand it. . . . My own idea is that in certain cases people just efface themselves from humanity. But it can't be very clear since they are obliged to give lectures to explain it. . . . When I saw that Belgium had been invaded, treated with contempt, shelled, burnt, insulted, slandered, I expected a protest from Switzerland, some official indignation, a cry of horror and sympathy, something. . . . And there was nothing! . . . nothing . . . nothing! . . . Nothing but discussions and disputes in the papers. And from headquarters, nothing but warnings to be quiet, to say nothing. One would think that they were all dead at Berne. Dead of what? . . . not of too much courage, anyhow! . . . We talk of William Tell. . . . How many

people nowadays would refuse to salute the hat? . . . Oh, it's been coming for a long time. The people have grown soft from over-civilization: all these new-fangled things, tunnels, hotels, chocolate, good eating, white shoes, the best seats at the play, kursaals, folly in three acts, trusts, speculation. . . . In the long-run, we are tied and bound; we all want to sell, and we don't want to offend possible customers. . . ."

"But what good could we have done if we had protested?" objected Madame Potterat.

"To the Belgians, no good at all. But for ourselves it would have been good. To be brave gives an increase of strength. . . ."

The moon, coming out from behind the mountains, threw its silvery scarf over the Lake, checkering the earth with its deep shadows and strange brilliance. Madame Potterat suddenly exclaimed with a start:

"Good Heavens! . . . Just imagine oneself in Belgium, and someone all at once shouting 'Here they are!' . . . Imagine seeing the horizon red from burning villages. . . . How dreadful! . . . I should run away with Carlo. We should run, and run, and run, until we dropped. We should hide in a forest. . . ."

"Yes," replied Potterat. "We don't put ourselves in the place of others half enough. We live only for ourselves. . . . We entrench ourselves behind our mountains. . . . We provision ourselves. . . . Nevertheless, in the main we are sound, there's not any lack of heart. But what we want is someone to lead us, men like Bonivard, Winkelried, Davel, with whom honour and action were one. . . . To-day we finesse, and diplomatize, but there it ends, our virtue seems to consist only in words. . . . But there! . . . It's no use talking! . . . Let's go along as far as Vidy, and see how Louise is getting on. . . ."

The farm stood all by itself. A lamp lit up the immense kitchen. Bent over some baskets Louise was wash-

ing salad. Her face was lined and drawn from fatigue. She described her life to them: rising early, going to bed late, getting little real help from a rough untrained servant, anxious about her husband, who spoke in his postcards of sprains and blistered feet.

"Look here!" said Potterat, much moved by the sight of that lined and worried face, but a little while ago so smooth, "I shall come down every morning for a time, and lend you a hand, and every afternoon too. It will be very good for me, it'll take off a little of my fat."

Louise thought at first that he was joking, but he repeated his promise on leaving, and they parted on excellent terms. On the way back, as they were passing the Cemetery of Montoie, Potterat began to muse aloud, as he had a habit of doing.

"Sleep well, you dead. . . . We are sending you some comrades now, young and healthy. . . . You'll see them soon, look out for them. . . . We are logical, I must say! We spend hundreds and hundreds to make our schools hygienic, we fight against tuberculosis, against typhus, against cancer, against phylloxera; we wrap ourselves in cotton-wool, we proclaim ourselves civilized, well dressed, good friends all round. . . . Then the trumpets sound the call to arms. . . . It is War! . . . And where yesterday it was a fifty-franc fine for a blow of the fist, to-day it is a decoration and a Te Deum for him who has killed three thousand men in five minutes! . . . Humanity? . . . I'm damned if I can see any meaning in the word at all now! . . . And why are some walking about here fat and well-liking, while other poor fellows are being buried by the light of a lantern, dragged along by the feet, and chucked into a hole. . . . Why not we? . . . All those who are shot and buried like that, are certainly as good as ourselves. Yet we don't even protest. We go and buy macaroni! . . . I one of the first! . . . Damn it all, I feel ashamed of myself!"

## CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the storm, the calm. Potterat sank into a chair before a cupboard gorged with provisions.

"Let's say twenty pounds of lentils, thirty of rice, forty-four of macaroni, twenty-six of maize. There's an amount of solid nourishment for you!"

Just then Carlo came in.

"The boys at school say there will be nothing to eat this winter. Their parents told them so."

"Perhaps. In that case there will be a wholesale burying somewhere about the spring. That will be rather hard on you, my poor boy, you who are growing so big."

"But the cupboard is full."

"It certainly is. But in three months' time it won't be very full."

Feeling ferocious, Potterat unhooked from the wall his old carbine that had served him so well for many years in shooting competitions. He pretended to load it, took aim at an imaginary enemy, and pulled the trigger.

"Poum! . . . There you are!"

"That's right! Cripple yourself!" broke in Madame Potterat. "A lot of good that will do us!"

"Cripple myself! . . . I know my little weapon. . . . In case of an attack in force, I take up my station in the cellar. I block the window with mattresses. And by Heaven! I'll sweep the courtyard. I'll mow them down as they pass. I'll pile them up in heaps. I'll clear out the corners. I could hold the place for a fortnight. And after that I'd escape by the back gate."

That evening, frightened by the alarming telegrams



in the papers, and his imagination inflamed by the bloodthirsty adventures of Nick Carter (he devoured an instalment of these each week), Carlo refused to sleep alone in his room. He wailed feverishly.

"All right then, all right! We'll move your bed into our room."

No sooner said than done. Carlo consented to go to bed under the protection of the big walnut bedstead. But as he still could not sleep, and his eyes were feverishly bright, his father took down his carbine again and laid it on the window-sill.

"There now! Are you satisfied? . . . Just let them come now!"

Carlo contemplated the carbine whose murderous eye raked the suburbs. And presently he was asleep. Happy age of childhood which passes at a bound from fear to perfect confidence!

Potterat himself was much longer in going to sleep. It may be that across the ether that transmits the tragic fluids were borne to his inner consciousness the cries of mothers, the wailing of little children, the groans of men dying on the field of battle. In the silence of that peaceful summer night, Potterat reviewed with a sort of humiliation the little rules and regulations that he had indulgently administered under the auspices of the Communal Police. To arrest some petty thieves, to summon people for offences against the regulations, a bucket of rubbish forgotten on the pavement, etc. . . . What ignoble work! Then he thought, almost with terror, sitting up in his bed, of the madness which was hurling whole nations into the depths. He could scarcely understand it, this simple-hearted man who had retained the fresh ideals of the songs of his youth, the conviction that kings and governments were upright and loyal, shepherdeses beautiful and chaste, that mankind on the whole was good, except for some little peccadilloes

here and there. And here was he, looking on at the breakdown of laws, customs, decrees, and regulations, at the cynical proclamation that might was right. Suddenly Potterat nudged his wife with his elbow and woke her up.

"Françoise! . . . How can you sleep like that while ten millions of men are killing each other, and thousands of civilians are running away across the fields? . . ."

"And do you think that my staying awake will do any good? . . ."

"Not the slightest. . . . There, let's go to sleep."

At 7.30 a.m. a whistle announced the approach of the news-boy. Carlo ran down to the Square for a paper. Shortly afterwards, sitting on the sofa in the dining-room, where the trivial prettiness of the wall-paper contrasted with the large size of the room, Potterat read aloud the official *communiqués*, punctuating them with frequent exclamations, in turn pitying, indignant, and full of admiration.

"Nice sort of life the Belgians are having! . . . Men are lined up against a wall and shot without any attempt at a trial, simply for defending their own soil . . . brought down like starlings in vintage-time. . . ."

Potterat presently rose, red, perspiring, and panting with anger, and stumped round the table in his excitement.

"They are asleep, our Government! . . ." he said, "asleep! . . . Ever since the 1st August, they seem to have been dozing, with cotton-wool plugged in their ears. My goodness! And to think that it is the same people who have laid waste Belgium and Luxemburg who guarantee our neutrality! . . . And we hold our tongues as if it were all quite natural . . . but to keep silence now is like making oneself an accomplice. If this sort of thing goes on much longer, I'll write a protest myself, and publish it in the *Feuille d'Avis*. . . . This silence is too much for me. . . . It's all humbug what they tell

us about Switzerland if we are to grovel in the grass directly we see a bird of prey passing to and fro in the sky. . . . Oh, there's no one like us ! . . . We may soon have to add ' Fortunately ! ' . . . "

" David, do be careful ! . . . " begged Madame Potterat.

" No, I won't ! I feel that I should like to go up on the roof and shout all this towards the north—only the truth, after all, though I suppose I should be shut up for five years. . . . "

For Potterat was beginning to be suspicious. . . . Of what ? . . . He could not have told exactly. Very often he uttered words as obscure as his suspicions. In every stranger he saw a spy. Fortunately, Schmid wrote from the frontier that the spirit of the army was excellent ; he had received the cake, the chocolate, the flannel. The heat made him terribly thirsty. His feet were now all right. They had killed nothing up to the present but a hare in one of the forests of the Jura. They sang while they were on the march to make the way seem shorter, etc. . . .

Thinking of this letter, and of many other things, Potterat, kneeling on a sack, weeded Louise's garden, for he went down to Vidy every morning now to help his daughter, and help was certainly needed.

All round a peaceful silence reigned, broken only by an occasional bark from the dog, when a stray pedestrian passed the farm, and vanished from sight between the poplars bordering the white road. Yawning, and dragging his chain, the dog would then return to his kennel. . . . Everything spoke of peace, the beautiful view, the wide stretch of clear blue sky, the joy of nature in the growing plants and laughing flowers. . . . Yet all the time, beyond the smiling slopes, beyond the vineyards, the orchards, the Lake, Potterat saw far other scenes. His heart, in spite of a certain outward roughness of manner, had always held wonderful depths of tenderness for little

children, for those who looked up to him in trust and confidence, for the old and feeble, and for the poor and weak. And he dreaded the sight of tears because they moved him too much. So in spite of the glory of this beautiful summer day, Potterat remained grave and quiet. He felt sad at heart, as he peopled that solitude with scenes of war, saw women sitting amongst the smoking ruins of their homes, corpses lying near those silver-leaved willows, imagined smoke with flickering tongues of flame. . . .

Full of indignation, the good man went on doggedly with his weeding, digging his fat fingers into the hot earth, and grunting with the effort. Against the possible invader he launched in imagination his country's battalions; he ran and fought with them. . . . Forward! . . . Fire! . . . Hurrah! . . . Fighting, groaning, dying: what matters it what happens, if one is with those who are suffering, with those who are fighting for right, and honour, and country. . . . A cloud passed over the sky: the vision faded. Before his eyes there lay only the fields of lush grass, the walnut-trees, the Lake so exquisitely blue behind the waving curtain of reeds, and a sailing-boat with one white and one red sail motionless on the horizon.

In face of this peaceful beauty, Potterat's heart went out to his country. This dear land! He loved it so much. His own Canton was almost as dear to him as his wife. And Switzerland's history, more beautiful than any legend. Tyrants driven out at the halberd's point, rocks hurled down the mountain-side: Charles the Bold flying like smoke before the east wind. . . . And of course William Tell with his apple and his crossbow, and Winkelried receiving the spears in his breast, and Nicolas de Flue, and Pestalozzi. . . . And all its beautiful, simple, peaceful life, the little excursions, the songs, . . . the going off on Sundays to vote, and to smoke cigars with his friends . . . and the National fête days; flags floating from



all the church towers, the National flag, the Cantonal flag, the Communal flag . . . and bands, processions, luncheons, speeches. . . . The cheers that rang out while an orator drained his glass, after saying that the Swiss fear no one, that the blood-red of their flag signifies sacrifice, that they will always be ready to uphold justice and right. The crowd rises as one man, and, holding their glasses in their hands, they renew their ancient oath never to submit to a foreign yoke, and to bow the knee to God alone. . . . Then they go back to their homes, and before they go to sleep that night, they thank God that they are Swiss. . . .

And now to think that two little countries, her sisters in neutrality, had been invaded in defiance of signed treaties; that towns had been burnt and men shot because they had defended their native soil with the courage of despair; the whole soul of a nation trampled underfoot, and the heavy silence of the tomb left weighing on their hearts. And we? . . . Hush, be quiet! Don't say anything. . . . We can't do anything! . . . What? . . . No, no! Much better not to say a word, not to draw attention to ourselves! . . . And what are we provisioning ourselves against? . . . Oh, we are the best of friends! . . . (Some sugar.) I never said anything! . . . (Some macaroni.) I am a friend to all the world! . . . (Some coal.) And if some more sincere citizen talks too freely they very soon find means of keeping him quiet. . . .

Then, too, what endless discussions! Such sentiments! 'We speak three languages, and these nations all round us, on whom we must depend, are fighting. Naturally our sympathies go out to this one and to that one, but we can only exist as a nation by keeping neutral, whatever happens and whatever they do. When the storm is past, later on, we shall talk it over and decide what was right and just. By-and-by. . . . Just now there is too much smoke, too much uproar . . . people are too excited. . . .'

Poor Potterat, who had always believed, simple soul

that he was, that there existed something above and beyond these three languages, above these natural sympathies, something which was national unity, and the instinctive, spontaneous hatred, welling up from every true Swiss soul, for the brutal might that laughs at right !

However, it was necessary, apparently, to keep quiet if they did not wish to endanger the unity of the country. Potterat did not understand it at all. He looked for his ideal Switzerland, the Switzerland of the school and college songs, the Switzerland who loves her mountains, her flowers, her rushing torrents, who responds at once to the cry of liberty, for herself and for others. He knew she still lived. . . . But she seemed to be fettered. . . . By whom ? . . . By what ? . . . What did she fear ? . . .

He rose from his weeding, and straightened his aching back, and once more he gazed out over the smiling meadows, over the blue surface of the Lake just seen above the bushes, to that fair province of Savoy, where so many men had already laid down their lives in defence of something more than even the safety of their own province, or of their own country, . . . in defence of an ideal.

“ And we ? ” thought Potterat. “ Well, here we are every one of us muzzled. . . . ‘ Leave the country if you don’t like things, but we’re not strong enough to risk speaking out freely. ’ . . . It was Corbaz who said that to me the other day . . . to me ! . . . I did think in those first days that there was only a bit of dry rot among the branches, but now I begin to think that the roots are rotten too. ”

Louise called him for the ten o’clock repast. They all trooped into the cool dark kitchen—Ulrich, the man from Schwytz; Henri, from Bioley; the young Louis, his chin stained red with raspberries; and Potterat himself, perspiring freely, and glowing with life. They helped themselves to bread, and poured out their coffee. Ulrich ate and drank with his elbows squared on the table; he

interrupted himself only to catch a fly that had perched on his hairy arm, squash it, and throw it under the table. Henri remarked with an innocent air, that he only wished he could do as much to some other people, which provoked a surly response from Ulrich. At once a discussion began, which soon threatened to become disagreeable.

"Ah! if only they will leave us alone," said Louise.

"My word, you're not hard to please!" jeered Potterat.

"But one can't give up altogether the right to say what one thinks."

Then as Ulrich sneered:

"What are you sneering at, you? . . . You're Swiss, aren't you? You have sworn to uphold justice? . . . When a little nation is invaded and pillaged, it is your duty to speak out and protest. . . ."

"Was William Tell a Vaudois?"

"I begin to think so. . . ."

"Damn it all! . . ."

There was a silence. Opening a mouth filled with huge teeth, Henri stuffed an enormous piece of plum cake into it, then, as soon as he could speak, he said:

"What's the good of worrying yourselves? . . . What do you want to talk about the war for? . . . Can't you eat your food and not bother? . . ."

Potterat returned to his work. Some time passed, when suddenly Louise appeared beside him, holding up her hands in despair.

"Father, he's gone! . . ."

"Who?"

"Ulrich. . . . He left a note on the kitchen table. He complains that we don't understand him, that we insult William Tell. . . . Well, anyhow, he's gone, bag and baggage."

"That's a pity. Evidently, some people can't stand a joke. It depends very much on where you were born

and brought up. No doubt it's wiser to keep quiet. Well, the question is, who is going to milk the cows now? . . . That Ulrich had a devil of a temper, but he was a good worker, and capable. . . . Well, I must go and try to get someone for you at the registry office. . . ."

All the able-bodied young men being on the frontier, Potterat could only get an Italian, a mason out of work, who assured him that he had done a great deal of farm labour. This Italian, Donato his name, did not, unfortunately, hit it off with Henri. He was a little man, with a big head, clear grey eyes, animated gestures and fluent speech, and he did not in any way conform to the accepted standards of work in Bioley. He mowed too closely, and he dug too deep. . . . Henri, now the head man, declared that he was rude, disrespectful, overbearing.

"Do you know how to milk?" asked Henri.

"I had two goats in Italy."

Henri gave a shout of laughter.

"Come along, then, and see if you can milk cows."

Donato gazed respectfully at the enormous beasts that the Bioley man, sitting on a stool, was milking one after the other, his forehead leaning against the side of the beast, which was bedaubed with manure.

"Now you try. . . . Not so hard. . . . Gently, and try to do it in time. . . . Not with your hands . . . with your thumbs more. . . ."

All this time Potterat was cleaning out the stable with a creaking barrow. With his trousers turned well up, his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, and the perspiration pouring down his cheeks like rain on the petals of a peony, Potterat strained and bent as he came to the plank reared against the manure heap. Before overturning the barrow, he paused a moment, then with a tightening of the muscles, an effort of the loins and a sudden throwing out of the chest, the thing was done, and Potterat came down the plank again with the gravity



of an official, the prudence of a good citizen who has a respect for his clothes, but the practised ease of the born peasant.

"Don't work so hard, father," called out Louise, from the far end of the courtyard.

"Oh, never fear! I'm not played out yet. I like to work when I'm working, eat when I'm eating, sleep when I'm sleeping. . . . What do you think, Donato? . . ."

Donato showed all his teeth in a broad grin.

When he got home Potterat flung himself into an arm-chair.

"My feet are burning. . . . I couldn't pick up anything from the ground if you were to give me twenty francs; my back feels nearly broken, my blood seems to be going the wrong way, my ribs are aching, and my thighs, I can't touch them. . . . I expect I'll finish up with an attack of lumbago. . . . Let me have a look at the *Feuille d'Avis* while I'm smoking my pipe."

'Liège! . . . Namur! . . . Maubeuge! . . . France invaded!' . . . His pipe went out.

"Good Heavens! The whole of Europe seems likely to be drawn into this. I bet you it won't be six months before we hear the goose-step going past here. . . . Better to die of starvation! . . . Better to fall down dead! . . . Ah, the news makes me ill. I feel as if I want to go and walk all round the Lake. It's a good thing that I'm helping Louise. . . . To work, to tire myself out, that will do me good, and take my mind off all this. . . . Otherwise I'd make myself ill with rage. . . . I'll go back there to-morrow."

Donato had taken part in the Tripoli campaign. He was very ready to talk about his experiences.

"To have to eat and drink in that sand, under that sun, I tell you it doesn't bear thinking about. . . . I used to suck little pebbles, and try to pretend to myself that they were pieces of ice. . . ."

"Were many killed?"

"The sun killed more than the guns. . . ."

Henri muttered something. Immediately the Italian threw a black look at him.

"What's that you say?"

"Me? . . . I didn't say anything."

A little later, they were working together, getting in the hay cut the evening before, as quickly as possible, for a storm was coming up. Standing on the waggon Donato was stacking the hay passed up to him on the point of the fork by Henry.

"You don't know how to pile hay," said Henri suddenly.

"Sacramento! . . ."

"I say you don't know how to pile hay. . . ."

Donato started. There were more lightnings in his eyes than in the clouds. With the suppleness of a cat he flung himself from the top of the waggon, and landed right in front of his adversary, who brandished his hay-fork to keep him at a safe distance.

"What was that you said about Italians when we were drinking coffee? . . ."

"Me? . . . I said nothing. . . ."

"Yes, you did. . . . You said 'Macaroni!'"

"Well, and if I did? . . . Macaroni's good to eat. . . . There's no harm in that. . . ."

"Sacramento! . . ."

Donato was about to spring on him when Potterat intervened.

"You're quite right, Donato. You must make yourself respected . . . but also you must learn to take a joke. . . . You people of the South are far too ready to fight. And this is not the time for that sort of thing either. Go on now! Both of you shake hands! . . ."

"Never! . . ." cried Donato, and took himself off in high dudgeon. An hour later, his bundle under his arm, he quitted the farm.

"You ought to remember, Henri, that the Italians are very touchy. As you go on in life you'll learn that you must talk to different people in different ways."

The work was now redoubled for everyone. They had, it is true, the kindly help of a boy scout, very clean and neat, and very good-natured, who hovered about the vegetables unweariedly.

But in spite of all their efforts, the fruit rotted on the trees, the spinach ran to seed, salads turned yellow and faded for want of water. And, to crown all, the farm mare one evening, as they were harnessing her into the cart, lay down between the shafts, as if dead. In spite of objurgations, a touch of the whip, coaxing, and caressing, there she lay on her side, her head stretched out, her lips drawn back over her teeth. The veterinary surgeon declared it to be an apoplectic stroke, bled the mare, and ordered ten days' rest in the stable. Potterat and his auxiliaries were overworked, stupid from over-fatigue. The sunshine danced on their bent backs, their tanned necks, and on the tops of the hills. Potterat was trying to forget the nightmare of the war in hard work, but some internal ear, as it were, seemed perpetually open to the noises and rumours of the eternal fighting. He suffered vicariously for all those trellised vines, those homes once so happy, those ears of corn, those branches laden with fruit, torn by shell fire from their trunks in the orchards of France and Belgium. . . . And for those dark little heaps on the bare ground, which once were men.

"Which side are you for? . . ." asked Potterat suddenly of the little boy scout, who was immensely enjoying playing at being a peasant for a time.

The schoolboy, a slim stripling in khaki, replied promptly, and his answer was satisfactory to Potterat. But he added:

"But one must give them their due. In chemistry, they are simply wonderful. Last year, when my father

was travelling there, he saw a kitchen run entirely by electricity. They even cut up the meat by electricity. . . .”

“ Did they digest it, too, by electricity ?” interrupted Potterat. “ I don’t think I should altogether fancy that electric sort of life. It would make one hard, I think. . . . They seem now to be trying to wipe out everybody with their electrical contrivances. . . . No, give me something natural. All this science and chemistry is devilish work. To know everything, is to spoil everything. . . .”

“ But it’s a good thing to study life. . . .”

“ To study life ! . . . Why ? What will you find in it ? . . . Life wavers, as you might say, between a note of exclamation and another of interrogation. The wisest people are content not to try to know too much. You can’t cure a toothache by watching an aeroplane dance about in the air. No, Mother Nature’s good enough for me. I’ll stick to her.”

Potterat returned home after these days of hard work under the hot sun exhausted to such an extent that one evening his wife said to him :

“ You’re doing too much altogether, David. . . . You’re out of breath now when you come up the stairs. . . . And besides, your clothes smell of the stable continually now. I saw Madame Sauer make a face the other day when she came in. . . .”

“ I don’t care ! . . . Tell her that the smell of cows is good for anæmia. . . . I couldn’t possibly leave Louise in the lurch these two last months . . . the worst of the whole year. She is worn to a shadow as it is . . . a regular August cat ! . . . But now that the news of this victory on the Marne is confirmed, and we can breathe more freely, there won’t be so much need for me to kill myself with work in order to keep from thinking. . . . To-morrow, I’ll go round the registry office again, and as soon as I can find someone suitable, I’ll take a holiday.”

A temporary registry office had been established, to



meet the circumstances of the moment, in a former public office in the heart of the city. Still proudly displaying the official shield on its pediment, and the word 'Office' below, it reminded Potterat pleasurably of the comfortably regular and well defined life of the public service; the slow and sure movements, the order, the traditions that he loved. He even rejoiced in the familiar bored yawn of the concierge, as he pointed the way down a maze of corridors with extended hand.

This office was being run by voluntary workers, educated and orthodox people, patriotic students, etc., who saw in this work an opportunity of helping in this hour of national stress. From dawn to dark there passed before them a procession of Italian masons, seized apparently with a sudden love for farm work; of boy scouts, anxious to go and take care of cows; watchmakers ready to exchange the file for the fork. Behind the counter sat a benignant-looking individual in a white waistcoat, kindly and sympathetic.

"You know we are passing through a serious crisis. Our people are only too anxious to be useful, but they scarcely know how or where to begin, and they may have to be shown a little. . . ."

"Will he be afraid of the bull? . . ." asked a peasant, but the genial personage could give no answer to this. He folded his thin hands on his white waistcoat and was silent.

When Potterat's turn came, he moved up to the little opening.

"Good-morning, sir! . . . I come on my daughter's behalf. . . . She has a farm at Vidy. . . . Her husband is mobilized, and one of her farm hands has run away because of a silly joke. . . . Well, I want a good strong fellow, not too young, not perfection, for that I know is not to be had, but trustworthy and honest. A native of these parts, naturally, if possible. They may be some-

what less lively, but they have cooler heads than people from farther away."

The chosen one was a man, blind in one eye, fifty-two years old, who hailed from the Pays-d'Enhaut. He knew how to wield a pitchfork, anyhow, and spit in his hands in the usual way, and work not too feverishly, and chaff and joke.

"I'll leave you now," said Potterat to his daughter. "This one-eyed fellow can see better than many another man who's got both his eyes. . . . I must give your step-mother a turn now. She doesn't like my being away so much. . . ."

Louise's eyes shone with gratitude.

"I'm very thankful to you . . . and so is Justin . . . he says so in every letter. . . . I wish you understood him better. . . . He's a bit close and over-cautious, but at heart he's sound enough. . . ."

"That's all right! . . . Everyone has his own nature. . . . He can't change himself. . . . I'll remember this in future. . . ."

"That's right! . . . Now do you know what I want you to do? Carlo will give you a hand. I want you to take the little cart and a basket and fill them from the big apple-tree at the bottom of the garden. You must have something for your trouble. . . ."

"Thank you, I will. And we'll think of you when we are eating apple fritters. Now then, Carlo! . . . not to mention that this Marne victory has put me in quite good spirits again. . . ."

The red-cheeked apples fell with a dull thud into the outstretched sheet. The bees hummed loudly round the asters in the sweet perfumed air. And presently the father and son went off, drawing the little cart. Near the reeds and the willows where Major Davel had died, Potterat stopped, and drew his son towards the monument.

"Look here, Carlo! History in class is rather dull, you know, but out in the open air, it's more interesting. Just here where we are standing a very brave man, a native of these parts, a vine-grower, was killed, simply because he tried to deliver the Canton of Vaud from slavery. As a matter of fact they cut off his head, and good Vaudois looked on calmly. It is a good thing to learn while young to honour great men, but this man was a martyr as well. He ought to be honoured even more than any of the others. Well, one is better than nothing! . . . Compared with Davel, what poor creatures we are! He died for an ideal . . . a noble death. . . . His disease doesn't seem to be very catching, does it? . . ."

The reeds rustled against the stone, and murmured their eulogy; the evening breeze swept over it the gold and silver and russet of the first autumn leaves.

"All honour to you!" said Potterat again.

Some crows, a sinister band, with outstretched necks and great outspread wings, flew across in the direction of the Jura; Potterat jeered at them.

"You're too late, you devil's grave-diggers! . . . At the rate at which Joffre is marching. . . ."

"Who's Joffre?" asked the boy.

"He is the grandson of Joan of Arc, and the nephew of Davel. . . . Come along! Let's get on with our apples!" and drawing the little cart, father and son took their way again along the white road.

Potterat was in his garden with the little cripple when he suddenly said:

"Robert, shout: 'Long live Joffre!'"

Astonished, the child looked up at him.

"Don't you know about Joffre?"

Possibly the little one may have heard the name, but it had escaped his memory; he remembered only the colour of the flowers, the pattern of a wallpaper, anything

that could bring a gleam of brightness into his stunted soul.

"Well, listen, and I'll tell you about Joffre. . . . He is a rather fat man, like me, but ever so much cleverer. . . . Such a fine head he's got! . . . And a big moustache, and a kind smile! . . . Everyone runs after him. . . . And now, this is what he does. . . . Can you understand? . . . He retreats, he crosses rivers, and streams, and canals: and still he retires. And then suddenly, a half-turn to the right. . . . Forward! . . . Quick march! . . . and then Crash! there's such a burst of fireworks that the other leaps back for about fifty miles! . . . And Paris is saved! France is saved! The world is saved! . . . Do you understand?"

"Yes," said the little invalid, terrified.

"And I could tell you many other things . . . only we are neutral. . . ."

The thing that most impressed Potterat in this war—for with all his common sense he had the vivid sentimentality of the man of the people, a creature of instinct and concrete imagination—was the conflict between different nationalities, different attitudes of mind, different outlooks on life, between the will for oppression and the will for liberty. For he simplified everything to the uttermost.

"'Round heads against square heads,' it is quite simple. We, thank God, have round heads, so we know in whom we ought to believe, and with whom to have sympathy. Children can always find their mothers. . . . Since that affair of Belgium, it's the duty of every true patriot to speak out."

Potterat's imagination was so vivid that for the time being he remembered no longer his age, his name, his nationality. Little by little, however, for no man can live at such high pressure for long, the waves of glory ebbed from that over-heated brain, he came back to his



surroundings. He saw once more the closed-in courtyard, the five stories, the balconies with their cemented roofs, the puffy face of the nursemaid at the Sauers', Robert's frail little limbs, and lastly, himself, with his increasing corpulence. He said presently to his wife:

"It doesn't seem right, somehow, to have regular meals, to fatten oneself systematically. Since the war began, I can't bear it. . . . I feel as if my blood were on fire, my thoughts run on nothing else. . . . I go with the armies in imagination. . . . I charge with them! . . . It maddens me, to have to sit here, doing nothing. . . . You see, I am naturally an active man, a born fighter . . . and then, too, I can't get this Belgium out of my head. . . ."

One day Potterat came in with a mysterious parcel under his arm.

"What have you got there?" asked his wife.

"You'll soon see . . . or rather hear," said he. And from that time might be heard every evening after supper the strains of a gramophone coming from the dining-room, where Potterat shut himself up with it. Over and over again he played the selection of airs he had chosen: 'Roulez Tambours'; the 'Cantique Suisse'; the 'Ranz des Vaches'; the 'Marche Lorraine'; 'Sambre et Meuse'; the 'Petit Alsacien'; and Déroulède's 'Clairon.' A sort of intoxication possessed him; as the trumpets brayed out the warlike strains, he marched round and round the table, his walking-stick on his shoulder by way of a rifle. "War in a room isn't quite the same thing as war in the open air, certainly, but it's something. . . . If I only close my eyes for a minute, I can see the flags flying. . . . I can hear the thunder of the guns, the bullets whistling through the air. . . ." Potterat's martial enthusiasm quite carried him away at these times. He lived in turn through terror, horror, and the intoxication of actual battle. . . . He charged an armchair with his walking-stick bayonet. . . . Ah-h! . . . Then he saw himself wounded, a limb

amputated, decorated, . . . and then, multiplying himself, he was by turns the crowd which applauded, the General who decorated him, and the wounded hero. . . . It was Nasillard, the well-known baritone, who sang in the gramophone the adventures of the 'Petit Alsacien'; a volunteer, engaged in fighting for his beloved province, its storks, its blue skies, its birch woods, its churches. . . . Suddenly a cry . . . and the Petit Alsacien falls to the ground, mortally wounded. . . . Potterat, his chin sunk on his breast as he listened, shed real tears of sympathy. He gesticulated. And in the quiet of the well-protected room, he spoke:

"Me be silent! . . . Never! Never! . . . Let them come and surround me with fifty policemen, and a thousand soldiers, I should still shout: 'Bravo, Belgium! . . . Bravo, Luxemburg! . . . Justice and freedom for ever! . . . France for ever! . . . Serbia for ever! . . . Montenegro for ever! . . . England for ever! . . . All those who have fought and died for Belgium, for the independence of little nations! . . .'"

Then he changed the record, and listened gravely to the "Cantique Suisse," echoing in his heart the line 'God will bless us from the heavens.' "The true, good God, naturally," he said to himself. "As for the other . . . as for the other. . . . Well, there is no other. . . ."

Madame Potterat was not so enthusiastic. "I can't think how you can enjoy those old tunes so much," she grumbled.

"Oh, it cheers me up, raises my spirits. . . ."

"Sometimes I wonder if you're Swiss at all now. . . ."

Potterat fell back a step at this libel.

"What? . . . What's that you say? . . . Who are you talking to? . . . I'm a pure-bred Vaudois, Swiss through and through. Listening to the songs of those who fight in a noble cause doesn't mean that a man is a traitor to his own country. Now I'll put it to you: Suppose

it had been ourselves who had been invaded and destroyed instead of these other people, and that you heard from somebody that, away over there in Belgium, someone listened to our patriotic songs on the gramophone, out of sympathy, you wouldn't say he was a traitor to Belgium, would you? . . . It's just because I love my country so much that the account of that invasion has upset me so. It's those who take it all calmly who are false to the traditions of their forefathers. . . . And then you, at any rate, can do something to help, . . . you are knitting for the soldiers, for the wounded. . . . But *I'm* like a great bumble-bee, droning about. . . . This gramophone makes me feel for the moment as if I were in the middle of it all. . . . How's the knitting going on? . . ."

"I've done two pairs of socks for Ernest, two pairs for Schmid, one pair for Cousin Auguste, four pairs for the Red Cross, and six shirts; and this evening I start on some things for the men in the trenches. . . ."

"Make some more of those affairs that keep the stomach warm. There are three places where a man feels the cold most—his stomach, his feet, and between his shoulders. . . . Knit away, you women, as hard as you can. . . . You may hold thousands of lives at the ends of your needles. . . . Now, here in Switzerland, women are of more account than men, thanks to this knitting. . . . We men can only look on."

Every evening, while her knitting-needles flashed back the light, singing the gay song of workers with a clear conscience, Potterat read aloud the news of the day to his wife.

"Bravo! Give me the scissors!" he would exclaim on reading of some touching or some heroic incident. And he would cut out these, and add them to other cuttings already stored in a big yellow envelope, labelled 'Records of Brave Men.'

"Just listen to this! Doesn't it bring the tears to your eyes? . . . It's the last letter of a soldier at the

front: 'Tell my comrades not to weep for me. I die happy, because I've done what I could. . . . Tell the boys to stick to it, and to have patience. When a cause is just it always wins. The great thing is to carry on. . . . I salute the flag. . . . I'm going to sleep. . . . Good-bye! . . . ' It's almost too fine to be quite true, I'm afraid. But it's beautiful all the same. . . . ' He continued his reading: " 'The condition of things in Switzerland. . . . Sugar is rising in price rapidly. Our housewives had a disagreeable surprise this morning in learning that this commodity, so necessary to our daily needs, had gone up another ten centimes the kilo. . . . ' How annoying! . . . Let's see what else it says. . . . Oh, good! Splendid! That's something like! . . . Oh, I will certainly take some, a whole band of them! . . . We'll put beds in Carlo's room, in the drawing-room, everywhere! . . . Since one can't fight in reality, one can at least engage in the field of charity. . . . ' "

"What is it? . . . What's the matter?"

"The matter is that they're bringing some of these Belgians, who have been turned out of their homes, into Switzerland. . . . A committee has been appointed, and asks for the names of those who are willing to put some of them up. . . . We'll take some, shan't we? . . . You'd like to, wouldn't you? . . . "

Madame Potterat let her knitting fall on her lap; the tears shone in her kind blue eyes.

"Poor things! . . . Of course, I'd like to take some of them in."

"Oh, how jolly!" cried Carlo excitedly.

"Jolly? . . . What do you mean by jolly? . . . When you see these poor old men and women, in rags, tired out, perhaps irritable and cross—as you'd be if you had lost everything you had possessed—these poor children, flying before their enemies, you won't feel like shouting 'How jolly!' This is not a picnic, you know, it's a sad duty. . . . Everyone has his work cut out. Some have



to die, some have to have their legs cut off, we have to play the Good Samaritan. . . . Those who reckoned on our showing some spirit were disappointed. . . . Well, we may win back some of their respect by our charity; we will nurse and care for the old men and women, and the poor little babies without father or mother, and the terrified children. . . . All is not yet lost. . . . Now, shall we offer to take four? or do you think we could manage six? . . .”

“My dear! . . . Where do you think we are going to put them? . . . No, we can only take two, anyhow, to begin with.”

“And children, of course? . . . Orphans, if possible. . . .”

“Of course.”

“All right! . . . Oh, this will set me up again! . . . Those poor little children! We’ll teach them to like Swiss jam. . . . We’ll right ourselves in the eyes of Europe. Others kill, but we save life. . . . Well, I must see some of these Belgians here. . . . I shall tell them, too, what I think about things altogether. . . .”

Presently, when Carlo had gone to bed, and Madame Potterat’s knitting-needles were once more clicking under the lamp, Potterat, his chin almost on the table, his tongue between his teeth, wrote laboriously as follows:

‘ TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE BELGIAN RECEPTION  
COMMITTEE.

‘ The undersigned and his wife, of 5, Avenue des Roses, the father and mother of a boy of nine, having room and a liking for children, and a strong desire to show their sympathy with the suffering Belgians, apply for two refugees, if possible children, and preferably orphans. They will be lodged, fed, and surrounded with the loving care of a family which will do its best to supply the place of those they have lost. An early and favourable reply

will oblige. Please state where, when, and how, we are to take delivery of these orphans. Switzerland for ever ! Belgium for ever ! From one who has a round head, and his heart in the right place, and who begs to remain,

‘ Respectfully yours,

‘ DAVID POTTERAT.

(‘ Late of the Police, now retired.)

‘ P.S.—If there should be three of a family, or even four brothers and sisters, we should try and manage to put them up.

‘ I remain,

‘ As before.’

Having finished and addressed his letter, Potterat said simply:

“ Let’s go to bed. For once, I shall get a good night’s sleep. . . .”

## CHAPTER IX

"THIS evening, at ten minutes to eight."

"Are you sure? . . . You've already gone up three times for nothing. . . ."

"Ten minutes to eight . . ." repeated Potterat. "I had it from one of the chief officials."

The moon-like electric light globes of the square outside the railway-station shone down on a closely packed crowd. Here and there someone stood on tiptoe; others tried to peep between the ever-moving figures in front of them; no one spoke much, for fear of dispensing any of their pent-up sympathy too soon. Everyone waited. Some trains came in, and presently went out again with the louder rumbling of empty carriages. And still nothing happened. A railway official passing, who recognized Potterat, whispered to him:

"It's no use standing about here any longer. They've sent them out by the little south staircase. . . ."

"By the south stairs? . . . By those dark passages where you can't see your hand before you? . . . that cut-throat place! . . ." and Potterat rushed off at once, followed by his wife and son, saying as he went, "They've gone out by the other side." The whole crowd ran too, portly gentlemen with their sticks under their arms, workmen in tweed caps, old men, bareheaded women, schoolboys, and schoolgirls with long plaits; a miscellaneous crowd, kicking up a dust that made a halo round the lamp globes. Through that December night a sad procession wound its way slowly towards the new school-house with its brilliantly lighted windows. At the spot where

Potterat was standing, between a piece of waste ground, and the tree-shaded promenade, it was too dark to see anything clearly. But soon one's eyes grew accustomed to it, and then one could begin to distinguish, between the helmets of the policemen, three flags mingling their folds—the French, Belgian, and Swiss flags—and behind these, some old men and women, their mouths a little awry from carrying packages too heavy for their strength, but which, nevertheless, they would not give up to anyone, because these were all they had left in the world. And many, many women with little children hanging to their skirts. . . . This procession seemed as if it would never come to an end. . . . On and on they went, these poor people who had seen those red stains made by blood which has sunk into the dust; the stiff forms of the dead, their glassy eyes staring into the distance; the red curtain of smoke from villages in flames, these people who had fled across their fields, running madly, leaping over the hedges. . . . “There they are!” . . . They turn round and run still more madly in another direction. . . . The more feeble fall exhausted at the foot of a hill . . . and always in their ears is the sound of the big guns, and sometimes that sound as of tearing calico, the monotonous tack-tack-tack of the mitrailleuses. . . . And now they seem to have come to an end of feeling, they know nothing of what is going on round them, they think of nothing, their mouths are half open, their eyes are fixed, their muscles stand out under their grey skin, and they march on, and on, and on, pell-mell, like a flock of sheep, with their wheelbarrows, their perambulators, and their little hand-carts . . . pell-mell with their cows, and sheep, and goats; and when the animals give out, they throw them into the ditches, and go on, and on, and on, too tired even to weep. . . . On and on, first to this little village, then to that, a little farther on, then to some little town, driven farther and farther each day, by the guns which come ever nearer. . . .



Why run away, when everything is lost? . . . Their homes a heap of smoking cinders; their harvests trampled down, ruined, pillaged; the grandmother, too old to run, left in that hell, saying: "I'd rather die here!" . . . husbands and sons prisoners, or shot perhaps. . . . "Here they are!" And then they are crowded into a train in the drizzling rain; the windows are dim; they start on what seems an endless journey; now and then when someone tries to look out of a window after rubbing it with the hand, all they can see across the veil of rain hanging from sky to earth, are leafless trees, a red clock-tower occasionally, a road zigzagging across the track, and on it a dark ribbon, with glittering points in it here and there: and these were men who were going to fight; then night falls; and always they go on and on. Now when one looks out there is nothing but blackness, a menacing blackness, just now and then a glimpse of a lighted window. So there are still peaceful firesides in the world? . . . And still they go on, and on, through the night . . . they stop . . . they go on again; always they hold fast their bundles under their feet. Suddenly, someone tells them that they are in another country, a fact to which they are indifferent, since they have no longer a country of their own.

All these people, who have seen those rusty stains made by blood in the dust, who have been rushed here and there, who have glued their faces to the dim windows of railway carriages, and seen lights flashing for a moment through the night, are now walking whither they know not—if they did know, it would make no difference to them—and people look at them, and there are gentle kindly policemen all round them, carrying their bundles for them, and they feel sure that the bundles will be given back to them, since the kindly helpers' eyes are wet with tears.

From the crowd a cry goes up, and if it sounds a little stifled, it is because it comes from the depths of the heart: 'Vive la Belgique!'

"Let's get out of this," said Potterat. "I can't bear to see this procession. I feel as if I had a tight cord round my chest, a hand on my throat! . . . To think that we—we—might have been sent flying like that through Europe, trudging on a December evening between rows of unknown faces, with a valise and our memories! . . . My God! It makes me furious! . . ."

"Well, it's a good thing that everyone is so ready to welcome them. What a crowd! . . . And if they don't seem very demonstrative, perhaps it is because they are too deeply moved."

"For my part, I should like to have ranged up all the schoolboys along the pavements, and to have made them take off their hats to these poor people. . . . And the next day, the masters should have taught them how to think of it. . . . And there should have been a band, one in every corner, playing Belgian airs, airs that would have reminded them of their old home. . . . Can't you imagine what we should feel if we entered Brussels in our flight to the sound of '*Il est, amis, une terre sacrée*'? . . . How the tears would rush to our eyes! . . . It is by little touches like these that one shows sympathy best. That which comes from the heart, goes to the heart. When the heart is dead, a people is very near to the rigidity of the grave. . . . We are full of sentiment, only we're ashamed to show it! . . . Well, I hope they'll realize it all the same! . . ."

"Then, too, somebody might have made a speech. . . ."

"Oh, I don't know! I don't care for the set speech of some orator who speaks well, and rounds off his phrases. What counts is the personal touch, the warm handshake, the sympathetic glance, the spontaneous words of him who has nothing to gain, who is not obliged to roll and turn his words in his mouth fifty times, and put off the sequel till next year. As soon as official diplomacy comes in, the whole thing goes down ten degrees. And while they're bowing and scraping in-

side, the popular welcome is freezing outside. . . . There is a great difference. . . .”

“Then you think that there should have been more of a demonstration? . . .”

“Not at all. As it was, I couldn’t stay until the end. No, I was speaking generally. It’s this idea of leading them through all the little back streets that I don’t like. . . .”

“Perhaps they were afraid of tiring them.”

“The warm-hearted sympathy of the people couldn’t tire anyone. But the back ways are ‘more neutral,’ I suppose.”

As soon as they reached home again, Potterat began:

“Now, I’ve been thinking over this question of room again. . . . Two beds only. . . . I keep thinking about that drawing-room of yours. What do we want with a drawing-room in war-time? . . . Roll up your carpet! . . .”

“Oh yes, do roll up the carpet, mother,” chimed in Carlo.

Abruptly, realizing her duty as a privileged Swiss woman, Madame Potterat yielded.

“Certainly, I’ll give up my drawing-room. . . . We ought to be thankful that we have one to give! . . .”

So the drawing-room was transformed into a dormitory. To give it a touch of patriotism, Potterat brought from the town the oath of the Swiss Federation, a picture of the Battle of Morat, which he hung above the beds, and a brush bag, embroidered with gentian, edelweiss, and rhododendrons. Then he began to grow impatient.

“When will they come, these children, I wonder? . . . Whatever happens, we must have children. One gets fond of them, and they have no fads and fancies. . . .”

“I should like some little girls best, some pretty little girls. . . .”

Silently, they stood with their arms folded, surveying the little white beds, half hidden in the soft shadow of their curtains.

"It all looks very nice. . . . We have done everything we could to make it so, anyhow. . . ."

The disappointment of the couple was immense when they received a very thin old man, and a little woman with a tanned face from which her blue eyes shone out with the quick frightened glances of a hunted animal. They concealed their discomfiture, however, as well as they could.

"Come in, come in, all the same! . . ." said Potterat. "You must try to feel at home with us. What we have we offer you with all our hearts. Welcome! . . ."

Silently, Madame Potterat, and then Carlo, shook hands with the new arrivals, who stood timidly in front of their little valise, which they had set down on the tiles of the hall. Madame Potterat murmured something of which they only caught the word "pleasure."

"Madame, do not speak of pleasure. There is no more pleasure. . . ."

And shaking her head, and raising her short stumpy hands, made still more squat by her mittens, the little woman allowed herself to be led away by Madame Potterat. As she murmured something about rest, supper, a comfortable bed, the woman stopped, and once more raised her hands.

"Oh, if you only knew! . . ."

As for the old man, he smelt of smoke and said nothing. Presently they were all in the kitchen, Carlo, red in the face with his efforts, worked the coffee-mill with tremendous energy; his mother beat up eggs; Potterat drew the cork of a bottle of wine. Suddenly, with a smile, he confided in his guests.

"To tell the truth, we expected some orphans. . . . And perhaps we've got some, after all. . . . Anyhow, at your age, you need a little affection. I can well imagine myself in your place. When one has been born, married, and had children, and has buried one's parents, all in the



same place, one has grown into it firmly, especially men . . . they have their clubs, their politics, their inn, their occupation, their colleagues. . . . And then to be uprooted, swept away from all one's bearings, driven here and there through half Europe, to have to live among strangers. . . . Oh, it's a terrible thing ! . . ."

As the old man still remained speechless, Potterat remarked later, when they discussed their guests:

"He doesn't talk much. . . . But it's very natural, after such a shock. . . . We'll have to watch him, and see that he doesn't try to hang himself from the curtain poles. . . ."

Under these words, Potterat hid his emotion. He was very deeply moved, and he winked his eyes hard to keep the tears back.

"Just think ! . . . To have to settle down amongst strangers at his age ! . . . Imagine us in such a position ! . . . We must pet them up, and be as nice to them as ever we can ! . . ."

Jeanne Cremet, the little old woman, had been born and brought up, and had lived throughout her married life, in a little town near Ostend. She had had eight children, four of whom had died when very young. The husband was a fisherman, a very precarious trade . . . for once that one makes anything by it, one comes back twice empty-handed.

Drawing from her apron pocket a crumpled picture-postcard, Jeanne Cremet said:

"That is the street we lived in. And that window there is our house. And that is the Hôtel Vin Clairet, where I often used to go and cook wedding breakfasts. This picture-postcard is all I have now of our old home. . . . Everything ! . . . You see, we had to fly at two o'clock in the morning. They were simply pouring in ! . . . The noise and uproar, the dreadful screams ! . . . and the poor

people running, running, running away by every road out of the town . . . grandfathers with yelling children, men dragging carts, others carrying sick people. . . . I was leading a little grandchild, and my husband two others. . . . How we ran ! . . . We had actually to fight our way on to one of the boats. Everybody wanted to get away at once, no one would stay behind. . . . They had heard enough about the things that had happened to make one's hair stand on end ! . . . And when at last we did get away, there were sixty of us in a boat made to hold twenty. . . .

"And your three little grandchildren, what became of them?"

"There is one at Calais, and two were taken to England. . . . As for my two sons, and my two daughters, we haven't the least idea where they are. . . ."

"And how did you manage on that boat?"

"The water came up level with the decks. On the way we passed ten English men-of-war, and each time we thought we should have gone under, because of the wash. We kept saying to each other: 'Oh, if only we could feel dry land once more under our feet! We shouldn't leave it again, for fire, or plague, or Germans! . . . Any death is better than drowning. . . .' We were eighteen hours before we got into Calais. And many people were sick on board, so sick that they just lay on the ground anywhere, across the gangways, and people walked over them. They didn't care. . . . They were more dead than alive. . . ."

For some moments Louis Cremet had been staring, without seeing them, at the portraits of Potterat's two wives. They seemed to be smiling at him, these two, and also the photographs of the policemen, in their tunics with glittering buttons.

"For my part," he said at last, "I should have been glad if that boat had gone down. For all we are likely

to get back. . . . It was our own . . . the house, you know. . . .”

“ Oh, be quiet ! . . . We’ll begin to work again . . . we’ll rebuild it. . . .”

In vain did Madame Potterat, too, try to picture their return to their country, once more their own, taking up their old life again. Cremet did not even hear her: his light eyes seemed to be gazing within, seeing only the ruin of his life, the end of everything.

Carlo, dreadfully disappointed, said to his school-fellows:

“ We have some old people. At first, it was rather amusing, but they keep telling us the same things over and over again. . . .”

They often looked at each other without saying a word. On each side they were fully determined to do everything that was right. But good will alone is not always enough. When Madame Potterat spread out on the table a length of new linen, saying: “ With twenty yards or so of that, you could make yourself a little outfit,” Jeanne Cremet’s face wrinkled up with emotion.

“ To think that I had almost the whole of my wedding trousseau still ! . . .” Her hands wandered sadly over the linen. She saw again in imagination the smoking ruins of her home. And suddenly, unable to bear the silence of this house where she knew no one, she heard in a rush of memories the noise of the sabots clattering along the little street, the neighbours calling to one another from their doors or windows; she remembered the general esteem which she enjoyed, because of her skill in cooking; she saw once more the fishing nets hanging up to dry in the shed; a triangle of sea green between the gables, and the sound of the well remembered patois; all the familiar sounds, all the familiar faces, the pavements where she had walked a thousand times, the cream put to rise on the stand, the sugared cakes just

out of the oven, her grandchildren coming home from school, rushing upstairs four steps at a time. . . . All these dear memories rose up and clutched at her heart. . . . She felt she wanted to be alone so that she might cry like a child.

Cremet, fortunately, was a great smoker, so Potterat set aside for him one row of his pipe-rack, containing two cherry-wood pipes, and got him some Dutch tobacco. He took him down to the border of the Lake, and pointed out its beauties. He introduced him, too, to Perrin, the old fisherman. And they went together to take up the nets. At last one evening, as they lay just off St. Sulpice, taking his pipe out of his mouth, Cremet spoke. He described the fish he used to catch, his traps for them, the storms they used to have, etc. Playing up to him, Perrin retorted:

"Wait until you see what we can do in the way of storms! Water is the same everywhere: it is always at the mercy of the winds. Fresh or salt, it knows how to get back on you. . . . And those big fish that you catch up there? . . . They would be a bit coarse, and hard, I'm thinking? . . ."

"Hard! . . . As tender as butter! . . . they melt in your mouth almost! . . ."

"They are full of bones, I doubt. And besides they would have the taste of the salt water. . . . Ours are fresh and sweet to the taste. . . ."

"You're wrong there. . . . They're delicious, our fish . . . and our people know what's good to eat. . . ."

"You must make plenty of money, at that rate. . . ."

"You're wrong again. Everything is very cheap with us. Good quality, but cheap. . . ."

"In Switzerland, you get a good price for things, but living is very dear. You think you are rich, and you find you have nothing."

Then they were silent again. Cremet gazed at the



rounded shores, the white houses dotted about the hill-sides under the December sky. And suddenly deep depression fell upon him again, as he thought of his bleeding country.

"You are very sheltered here. . . ." There was a hint of something like jealousy in his voice.

"We are. Almost too much so," went on Potterat. "Of course, nobody wants war . . . perhaps, indeed, we don't think of it quite enough. But we're asleep. . . . We're far too trustful of strangers. . . . We think that everything is well because the wine is good. . . . The volcano is there, but we don't see it. . . ."

"You'll be treated the same ! . . . see if you aren't ! . . ." said Louis Cremet, with a sort of satisfaction.

"What's that you say ? . . . What about our mountains ? . . . We've got some fine fellows up there, too, to guard them. . . . Fighting is in our blood, you know. . . . And we are the best shots in the world. At 800 yards we never miss a bottle. . . . You Belgians have been brave beyond words, heroic. . . . You certainly did the right thing. . . . But we, if they attack us, we'll go for them like a pack of mad dogs. . . ."

The old man did not reply, and the conversation dropped again.

Madame Potterat, like the clever hostess she was, did her utmost to vary the diet, as far, at least, as she could with her store of farinaceous foods; but one day, when the two women were alone, Madame Cremet said to her:

"You go in for German cookery, I see. Macaroni, rice, sauces. . . ."

Madame Potterat reddened:

"German cookery ? . . . Not at all ! . . . We like simple, wholesome food, that's all. . . ."

"Oh, I wasn't criticizing it. . . . But your coffee now ? . . . Won't you let me make it for you some time in the Belgian way ? . . ."

Madame Potterat boiled inwardly. Were not the Vaudois women noted throughout the world for their good coffee? . . . What an insult! . . .

"Look here!" the old woman said. "I have knitted a strainer. You fix it into the coffee-pot, and the coffee percolates through it. You pour the boiling water in twice. And above all, you mustn't grind your coffee too fine."

Never before had Madame Potterat seen the old woman so bright and animated. She rolled up her sleeves over her elbows with an air of authority. A tinge of red came into her cheeks, her blue-grey eyes shone with animation, the eyes of a worker who finds again in the practice of her accustomed art some joy in life.

"What impudence! . . . What impudence! . . ." thought Madame Potterat, as she watched the old woman moving to and fro in her kitchen. "What a good thing that David is not here! . . . I don't think there is another woman but me who would drink her coffee after this! . . ."

Six o'clock. The men came in famishing, after their fishing. They had excellent appetites, found everything delicious, and did not notice the sharp glances the two women gave them as they raised their cups to their lips.

"Don't you notice anything, Louis?"

Louis raised his pale eyes in silence.

"Oh yes. It's real coffee this time."

"I should think so!"

"Haven't we always had real coffee? . . ." asked Potterat innocently.

"Yes, Monsieur Potterat, but not coffee made in the Belgian way."

Potterat guessed at once that these embarrassed words hid some jealousy of rival cooks.

"My word!" said he. "It is good, this coffee! And yesterday's was just as good; and to-morrow's will be

good too. . . . I think that you are, both of you, regular *cordons bleus*. It's good luck to have two in one house."

Then, as Madame Potterat reddened a little, her husband added to himself: "These feminine jealousies! . . . One has to deal with them as one does with the severely wounded. . . . Keep quiet, and look at them lovingly. . . ."

That same evening, he tried his diplomatic powers on his wife.

"You must be reasonable, you know. Every country has its own specialities. And even variations of the same speciality may be excellent. . . . One good thing does not hurt another. . . . These old people, remember, are poor old things who have escaped out of hell into an unknown world. They have their own customs, their own tastes, their own ideas. To them the Dent du Midi is nothing, nor our pictures that mean so much to us, nor even our way of making coffee, good as it is. . . . Supposing we had had to fly to Belgium, don't you think we should talk about our confectionery and our plum cakes? . . . Imagine us at Ostend in December, amongst people who lived on oysters and salmon, and we having nothing to do all day long but sit and twiddle our thumbs! . . . Why, I'm sure we should get queer and cranky, and half crazy. . . . We've got to realize that our things that we love don't appeal to them at all. They have nailed up on the walls of their room that old postcard in which they can see a window of their house; and a photograph of King Albert, . . . a fine-looking man he is, too; and a crucifix. And they'd rather have those things than all our pictures. These make them feel, you see, as if they still had their King, their religion, and their home. . . . And if, thanks to you, they are able to feel that they are drinking their own coffee too, why, so much the better. . . . We ought to put up cheer-

fully with any of their little fancies. . . . If they begin to boast about their things, it is to prove to us that they are not just vagabonds. . . . After all, these Belgians have sacrificed themselves for us, and for Europe, and it isn't much to ask of us, that we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves a little for them in return. . . . I feel so sorry for them both, but especially for the old man, who never says a word. I happened to look over at him the other evening, and I watched him for a minute or two. . . . He sat there watching the smoke of his pipe curling up, then he winked a tear away, and stretched out his hands to the fire, evidently remembering things. . . . Come, they're good old creatures, don't you think so? . . ."

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, that's all right. And look here, my dear, I should let the poor old woman brew her coffee as she likes. It pleases her, and doesn't make our way any the worse."

At four o'clock Carlo burst in from school, threw his satchel on a chair, cut himself a slice of bread and butter, and devoured it, hopping about all the time; tried on, mincing and grimacing, a hat of his mother's, took laughingly the rap on the head she gave him, and then imitated his master, who was very short-sighted, and had to hold every book close up to his eyes. All this amused the old woman immensely; she said, her voice trembling with emotion: "Do you know, that boy makes me almost forget my sorrows! . . ." And when she heard that the next day was his birthday:

"Oh, do let me," she begged—"do let me make him a tart?"

With eager delight she mixed the paste, her red cheeks like winter apples, her forehead, framed in grey hair, leaning over it lovingly; whipped some cream with tiny



straws of orange peel floating about in it, and when at last the tart lay, puffed up and golden, on its dish, ready for serving, her joy in activity suddenly departed, and she heaved a great sigh.

"How often I used to make these tarts at home! . . . Dear, dear! . . . But it is getting late, I must run. Are you ready, Louis? . . . Au revoir, Madame. . . ."

Always in the twilight, the old couple went out for a walk alone together, he in an overcoat of Potterat's, which had been considerably taken in and shortened, but which was still a good deal too big for him, and hung in folds on his chest and over his shoulders; she, very dignified and upright, her chin held high, her hands clasped in front of her. Where did they go? . . . No one ever presumed to ask them, but on this particular evening Potterat took his stick, and following them discreetly at a distance, found himself entering the Catholic Chapel at Ouchy. There was a murmur of prayer going on, and after a little one could see the altar, the choir, the white robe of the Virgin, and the little round head of the Holy Child. And on a low stool, kneeling side by side, were the two old people. What peaceful calm! What silence! Only this murmur of prayers, that star of light on the altar. "Is this really you, Potterat?" he asked himself, "you who have always considered almost as unbelievers those whose names are not entered on the registers of the Vaudois National Church? . . . Is it really you standing here dreaming in a Roman Catholic Chapel, with your eyes fixed on a statue of the Virgin? . . ."

"If I were God, I would send out my thunder-bolts to put everyone back into his place again, and . . . we know who . . . into the dust! . . ." he thought. "These poor old people praying! It is touching! . . . I'm sure their prayers are heard. I'm not of their religion myself, but we worship the same God, I'm sure. . . ,

The true God, He is. . . . The other one is not much of a God. . . . All the same He is pretty powerful, evidently. . . . He marches with the victorious armies. He draws the sword and orders the fire of the rifles. . . . He likes to see corpses of men, of horses, slaughter, and tombstones with soldiers' caps on them. . . . That God . . . is He not far more likely to be the Devil? . . . I shouldn't wonder at all! . . . And He certainly keeps His disciples up to the mark. . . . They spread His propaganda. . . . They put into practice the precepts of their master. Perhaps this is the beginning of the end of the world! . . . It's possible that the true God has lost heart and patience, seeing us all so bad, and thinks He'll make a clean sweep of the lot! . . . There were too many painted women, too much making eyes, too much false hair, too much eating and drinking, too much rushing about for pleasure. . . . And then people have killed off too many lions and tigers in those hot countries, with their 'big-game hunting,' and the souls of these beasts have come back into the bodies of men to-day. . . . And what about ourselves? . . . In theory, the heart of a Swiss ought to be like a mountain-top amongst his Alps, where the wind blows fresh and free, sweeping away all dust and disease. . . . That's what it is in theory! . . . . In practice, we put everything we have on our backs to impress the crowd: that was our only thought. . . . We have signed conventions, and we have mobilized. . . . We shall have enormous expense, and mighty little glory. . . . Fortunately, we've got these Belgians to take care of; at the Day of Judgment they may serve us as a lightning conductor. . . . But what started me off on this train of thought? . . . Oh yes, it was seeing those two old things at their prayers. . . . Yes, there's no doubt but He will hear their prayers. . . . We're not in the same fold, as I said, but in this particular case, I agree with them absolutely. . . . Ah well, I'm glad I

followed them. . . . They are evidently good people. In their way, too, they are fighting for their country. . . . They are not ashamed to bow the knee. . . . All honour to them !”

The table was laid when he reached home, and Potterat was glad to see that his wife had evidently recovered her wonted kindness and good humour. . . . “ These women !” thought he to himself. “ A mere nothing turns them to vinegar, and just as little makes them all smiles again; they cry their hearts out for a shadow, and revive like a flower under a ray of sunshine. Now we men, if anything upsets us, we are out of temper the whole day, at least. . . . Women are more changeable, more impressionable, more like the wind. . . . They’re up and down again all in a minute. . . . What a temperament ! . . . But it’s half the charm of woman after all ! . . .”

Carlo, the hero of the day, sat in the place of honour facing the smoking dishes, and the tart, round which burnt merrily nine candles, their dancing flames reflected in the excited eyes of the boy, in the grey eyes of Louis Cremet, in the melancholy eyes of his wife, in the loving motherly eyes of Madame Potterat, and the round merry eyes of her husband; and also in the silver and glass of the table. They ate and drank, then when they had almost finished, a specially fine bottle of wine was opened, and Potterat raised his glass.

“ I want to say two or three words, not a speech, you know, but just as they come to me. Here’s your very good health, my boy ! May you grow big and strong, and for that you must eat plenty of bread. In the same way you must feed and furnish your mind; the man who has a well-filled mind makes fewer mistakes in life than the man whose impressions run about in his brain without anything to fix them there. You don’t want to stuff it too full, of course, nor on the other hand to let it shrivel up because it is empty; you need not go contrary to

everyone else, but it's better not to conform too rigidly to those around you. Everything is a question of proportion, of equilibrium. Half heart, half reason, is a very good formula as a guide to conduct. And if you must lean more to one side than the other, let it be to the side of heart. But you mustn't listen to your heart alone, or you would die of indignation every day of your life. . . . We can't forget that we have here with us at this table some guests who have no longer a home of their own; we can't forget the war. . . . We are warm and comfortable here, with plenty of good food and drink before us, a good bed awaits each of us, and sound, refreshing sleep. . . . Yet, at this very moment, think how many there are in the trenches, in water up to their knees, covered with mud and thick clay, fighting for justice and liberty for all nations! . . . How many there are, too, under the earth, resting there until the last day! . . . How many more will die to-night! . . . Thinking of all this, as a consistent Swiss, as a Republican, a democrat, I drink to the health of General Joffre! May the true God, the only One, breathe into him wisdom and judgment! . . . May he purify the world as one scrubs a dirty floor: three buckets of water in a volley, then the scrubbing-brush and plenty of elbow grease! Afterwards, how it shines! And to make a still more thorough job of it, he may pass a knife between the boards to clear out anything which shouldn't be there. In other words, may Belgium rise again from her ashes, and flourish once more over her ruins! . . . And may all other little nations, her sisters, raise their hats to little Belgium, who sacrificed herself for the safety of the rest of the world; to the Belgians, who kept their word, who respected their treaties, who did not say, 'Necessity knows no law!' but rather, 'Honour knows no exceptions!' . . . For my part, in face of this outraged honour, in face of these citizens fighting to defend their country, unjustly



attacked, it is impossible for me to declare myself neutral. . . . My friends, I drink your health ! . . .” And Potterat emptied his glass.

“ You are a good man,” responded Louis Cremet seriously.

In spite of their efforts the little fête seemed melancholy to the hearts of the exiles. Presently the candles were extinguished. The evening paper arrived. Sensational headlines announced ‘ Bombardment of Ypres ! ’ . . . and the wind whistled drearily against the windows. Suddenly Potterat raised his head.

“ Do you feel terribly bored here ? . . . ”

Immediately he felt painfully conscious that this was not exactly the most tactful way to begin what he had meant to say, and he threw a glance at his wife, mutely imploring her aid. She knitted steadily, however, keeping her eyes lowered, so he went on:

“ Perhaps I’m meddling with what is none of my business. . . . Don’t think I don’t understand you, for I do. . . . I should feel it difficult, myself, to settle down in a foreign land, and at the seaside too. . . . Your way of living is different from ours, you look at everything in a different way, you think of the past constantly. . . . It is very natural, and we sympathize with you. . . . ” The old people’s eyes had filled with tears, and Madame Potterat interposed:

“ Oh, do stop, David ! . . . It is too painful ! . . . ”

But Potterat had dragged his chair up closer to the little sofa, and laid his big hand on the stiff arm of the old fisherman.

“ Excuse me, won’t you ? . . . My intentions are good. . . . I want you to try and like Switzerland. . . . Some people here are certainly contaminated by the microbe. . . . Well, they are to be pitied. . . . But the rest of us, and the most of us, are secretly boiling with indignation, though we perhaps seem to be taking it

all somewhat calmly. . . . It's so difficult for us to realize fully all at once all it means, the horror of this war. . . . But I assure you the injustice of it makes us furious, it makes us ill . . . we can never forgive it. . . . It is unforgivable. . . ."

At this moment the door-bell rang, and presently Carlo ushered in Vidoudez, the companion of many a fishing excursion, the enthusiastic office clerk whose fingers were always stained with red ink, . . . but a Vidoudez dejected, worn-looking, unkempt. Somewhat irritated at his conversation being thus interrupted, Potterat looked at the intruder, then, vaguely touched by his forlorn appearance, he rose.

"Hallo! What brings you along? . . . Let me introduce you to our Belgian friends—Madame Cremet, a first-rate cook, her coffee is a dream; and her husband, in ordinary times a fisherman, but for the present rudely thrown out of work by some wicked people whom we need not name. . . ."

They drew up their seats again to the table. Vidoudez, shy and nervous under the blaze of the unshaded electric light, rubbed his hands together. At last, in a gruff voice, he said:

"I came to ask you a favour. . . ."

An unfortunate beginning! Potterat thought uneasily, 'How unlucky! I have just enough to carry me through the month.'

"I want you to give me your advice as a friend . . ." he went on. "This is the affair. . . . My salary, you know, has been reduced . . . and prices have gone up . . . and my eldest daughter, Olga, the typist, has just been dismissed from her place . . . not enough work, they told her . . . and yet expenses go on . . . but it's impossible to make both ends meet. . . . I don't know what on earth to do. . . . This evening I said to myself, 'I'll go and ask Potterat's advice.' . . . What am I to

do about the girl? . . . How can I find her a place? . . .”

“Isn’t she engaged to young Decrausaz, of the *Instrumentale*?”

“She is, but he is mobilized. We have not seen him since the 2nd August . . . and when he comes back, will he get his old place again? . . . Everything’s at a standstill. . . . My wife is so worried by it all that when I came away, she and Olga were both crying. . . . We can’t go on like this, that’s certain. . . .”

Potterat smiled dryly.

“Do you remember how we were all as grand as milords last July? . . . The poets are right, ‘The beautiful days are short.’ . . . H’m, so typewriting is off, is it? . . . My word! The only things that go on as usual, it seems to me, are eating, sleeping, washing up dishes. . . . Do you understand? . . .”

No, Vidoudez did not understand.

“It’s plain enough. . . . Up to now, your girl has been able to keep her hands white. She has gone ‘Tra-ta-ta’ on her little machine . . . her husband, when she marries, however, will want his dinner. . . . Look here, Vidoudez, be practical; go and buy her a cookery book, and half a dozen aprons, and place her in a good house. . . . Yes; as cook, housemaid, anything. . . . She will get good wages, and she will learn to be a good housekeeper. . . .”

Vidoudez bridled a little.

“You don’t know Olga. . . . No, it would be no use. . . .”

“Who is master in your house? Give her an order, that princess of yours, and make her understand she’s got to obey. There must be authority everywhere. You give the command. This is war-time now, you know.”

Poor Vidoudez bent almost double and rubbed his hands together with a sound like crackling paper.

“No, you don’t know her. . . . Her mother and she

would never think of it for a moment. . . . She might go as a companion, perhaps. . . . Don't you know of anyone who wants a companion? . . ."

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm my own companion. . . . Look here, my dear fellow, it seems to me that you're trying to do the impossible. We've all done with luxuries for goodness knows how long. There are only three ways of making a living: either you must have private means, or you must beg, or you must work. . . . Give your princess her choice. . . ."

"Then you don't know of anyone? . . ."

"Oh yes, I know crowds of people, but no one who wants to take on a typist. . . . I tell you cookery is the best thing. . . . Let her learn to cook. . . . It's a good trade. . . . I myself have learnt to milk cows this autumn. . . ."

Vidoudez got up. "Well, I'll speak to them about it. . . . Oh, these scenes! They'll be the death of me!"

"Well, I hope to hear you get on . . . but in any case, let me advise you to keep your womenfolk well in hand. Be firm with them. When they are good, you may loosen the reins a moment, but without taking your eyes off them. . . . At the least chance, they'll break loose. Look out, they may already be feminists! . . . and nothing could be worse than that. . . ."

When Potterat came back into the room, Cremet took his pipe out of his mouth, a thing he only did on great occasions. Without making any remarks on the troubles of Vidoudez, he replied to what Potterat had been saying previously.

"You ask me if I am bored? . . . Well, we are very comfortable here with you, and you have been only too kind to us; we are most grateful. . . . But I must confess that the time does seem long. I pine like an old cat. . . . I sometimes feel that I would willingly die the next day if I could only see our old place once again. . . . And then,



it's terrible having no news of the children, or of our grandchildren. . . . Nothing ! . . . Not a word ! . . . It is dreadful ! We seem to have left them in hell ! . . . I feel just like a rat driven out of its hole by floods ! . . .”

Jeanne Cremet clasped her hands.

“ Oh, but the time is long ! . . . Long and weary ! . . . Four of our own children, eighteen grandchildren ! . . . One of them is at Calais, two are in England. . . . But the others ? . . . Where are they ? . . . Shall we ever see them again ? . . .”

Before this despair, Potterat's anger against all this brutality rose.

“ Oh ! the whole world is in darkness ! . . . One can't understand it at all. What a scattering of families ! . . . What fires ! What deaths ! . . . Now, if we were invaded like that, I know what I should do. I should take four down to the edge of the Lake one evening, and I should say to them, ‘ Just see how clear the water is,’ and suddenly, *zuh* ! . . . in they'd go ! . . . all four of them, and me after them, so as not to be hanged next day. Then at the resurrection, when I should come up dripping out of the Lake, holding my four by the hand, and the recording angel would call, ‘ Potterat !’ . . . ‘ Present ! Here I am, Lord, with the four that Thou gavest me !’ . . . ‘ Four ? . . . Thou hast been faithful over a few things. . . . That's well ! Sit there, good and faithful servant ! . . . ’ ”

## CHAPTER X

It was a grey day in February. Grey out of doors, and grey indoors. The newspapers were filled with the usual tales of the trenches, and the daily slaughter. Potterat, when asked by Sauer, whom he met on the stairs, how things were going, replied:

"Oh, they're going on. . . . I don't know whether one ought to say 'Fortunately' or 'Unfortunately.' . . ."

"He is quite overwrought, quite nervous and unstrung," said Madame Potterat to Madame Cremet one day. "He ought to have something to occupy him. . . . He broods. . . . The war, always this war. . . . He dreams of victory, but in the morning the news is always the same. . . . It wears one out. . . ."

"It is long! . . . a weary long time! . . ." moaned Madame Cremet. "One hardly dares to hope for any end. . . . It is long and sad! . . . And this grey sky! . . ."

Ten times a day she would repeat this. Every time she looked at anyone, she seemed to be asking them eternally: 'Do you think it will be over soon?' . . . And as no one ever replied, she would take up her knitting again, with a great sigh.

Potterat, having nothing to do, would wander aimlessly along the roads, dragging his low spirits and his anxiety with him. He generally found himself at Bigarreau's sooner or later, in the course of his walk. With him, at any rate, he could discuss the war. They were of one mind about it, and had the same hopes, the same plans, the same reservations, the same fears. Both were rather given to talking largely; carried away by their en-

thusiasm, they would suddenly come down with a crash to the hard rock of reality. They recovered their spirits very quickly, however, and began climbing the ladder again, rung after rung. On this grey but mild day of February, they chatted together as they went round the beehives.

"Listen! . . . They are beginning to buzz already. . . . They are talking to each other, telling each other all their winter dreams. They're doing now what Joffre is doing: planning out their spring campaign."

"Spring!" . . . The very word moved them. . . . What it would be like to be a bee in the spring! To rush out of the hive, into the sun, to roll oneself in golden dust, to drink in honey and perfume, to brush the gay wings of the butterflies with their more sober wings, to be a welcome visitor to all the flowers, and to die, at last, at the bottom of a lily-cup! . . . How infinitely better than the life of human beings, in this mad century! . . .

"These bees, you know, they set us a fine example. They work hard, they are orderly, and clean, and neat; they rise early, and go to bed early, and they are obedient . . . the queen has only to give a wink of the eye for all the rest to rush to do her will. . . . They have no use for grumblers in a hive . . . nor idlers, those people who are born tired. . . ."

But whatever they talked about, they came round, sooner or later, to the war.

"I wonder," said Bigarreau, "if it wouldn't be possible to make use of bees in war? . . . Suppose one put a kilo or so of them in a shell! Can't you see that shell arriving in a trench? . . . That swarm of angry bees! . . . And all those fellows stung in the face, in the neck, up their sleeves and trousers. . . . Imagine a man trying to shoot with a bee-sting in his eye! . . . Think what a sharp lookout you'd be likely to keep with three or four angry bees inside your tunic! . . ."

"Ah, and the worst place of all is when they sting you on the nose just between the two nostrils," added Potterat. "That happened to me once, and my word, I thought it was all up with me for a minute or two. . . . It's not half a bad idea of yours, that of a shell filled with bees. . . . We ought to drop a line to Joffre. . . . He can't think of everything. . . ."

Soon they were as usual wildly excited over the strategy of the Russians, firing at the calm horizon with wide sweeping gestures, half closing their eyes to aim at the sun, arguing about the rival merits of a frontal attack or a flank attack. . . . Bigarreau drew Potterat towards the toolshed, against the wall of which hung a map of Europe.

"These Russians, they always go too much in a mass. . . . They want more personal initiative. . . . What's the good of three million men crowded together? . . . The others send out patrols and throw bodies of cavalry on the wings, and there you are. . . . Now, if I were Duke Nicholas, I should take up a position more to the north. . . . That country is full of lakes. . . . Just the thing! . . . All you've got to do is to fortify the ground between them, and there you have a base of attack, and if that fails, a base of retreat."

It was Bigarreau's plan, this, and then Potterat expounded his views.

"In my opinion, it's in Serbia that the great offensive ought to be made. . . . They ought to send troops, and guns, and munitions there . . . secretly, of course. . . . And while this is being done, the Russians engage them in the north. Then, when all is ready, Joffre goes off to Serbia in a destroyer, takes over command, and attacks the Austrians in the rear. . . . Nothing demoralizes a country so quickly as to surprise it in the rear. . . ."

Their eager fingers, on the map, followed river-courses, crossed mountains, zigzagged across plains. Here Bigarreau objected.



"But in the plains you can't conceal your movements as you can in the mountains. . . . These aeroplanes see everything. . . ."

"Oh, we'd bring them down with a few shots. . . . And besides, we don't advance marching in full view and upright. We crawl along the ground. . . . In our military manœuvres I was always great at crawling. . . ."

"With that stomach of yours? . . . That's not exactly the game for you! . . ."

"You think I'd topple over, do you? . . . Well, look here! . . ." and Potterat flung himself flat on the ground, and with a suppleness and agility for which one would certainly not have given him credit, and aiding himself now and then with his hands and knees, he attacked a cabbage.

Suddenly, a voice from an upper window fell like cold water on this warlike enthusiasm. It was Madame Bigarreau's.

"Look here, you two would-be soldiers, try to be calm, will you? . . . You make one shiver to hear you. . . . When we have been spared, as we have been, you don't want to work yourself up like that! . . . That won't do any good! . . . For my part, when I see the sun go down behind the Jura, every evening, and when I think that it is going down over a country at war on the other side, I feel very thankful. . . . Peace is a privilege! . . ."

Potterat jumped up hastily.

"Good-morning, Madame! . . . A privilege, you say? . . . Just wait and see how that will end! Do you really think we ought to be content to know that others are fighting for our principles? . . . Doesn't Liberty concern us any more? . . . If the other small nations are invaded, are we to look on indifferently? . . . No, no, that sort of thing would lead one to commit suicide."

"Well, anyhow, I'll thank you not to excite my husband so much. As it is, he doesn't know what he's doing half the time . . . always fussing over those maps. . . . And he tears the paper into bits when the news is not so good, and finds fault with the staff-officers. . . . And it's nothing but grumbling all the time now. . . . There are days when I wonder if he's Swiss at all. . . ."

Bigarreau seemed crushed under this, but Potterat took up the cudgels on his own and his friend's behalf.

"My wife says just the same thing about me. . . . Madame, you women don't understand us, that's where it is. Our patriotism is above all suspicion. We're too patriotic, really. In certain circumstances it's not the finest thing to hold back from fighting. . . . Look here, Madame, suppose someone was murdering your husband here, what would you say to me if I was to sit by on a chair and look on, proclaiming my neutrality, hey? . . ."

"Oh, what's the use of talking nonsense? . . . And here I am, waiting for the last hour, for him to pull me some leaks! . . ."

In silence, Potterat looked out over the countryside: his beloved country, with its hills and slopes, over to where against the setting sun rose the smoke from little villages nestling everywhere in the folds of the hills, across the smiling Lake. . . .

"Yes," he said. "We have degenerated. . . . We're out of the storm, and we're glad of it. . . . Well, perhaps that is best. . . . But plants that grow in the shelter of a wall are not always the most beautiful. . . . We ought to try and atone for our attitude at the beginning. . . ."

"But how? . . ."

"Oh, in all sorts of ways. For instance, I intend to go to the station to meet all the trainloads of refugees coming in, and the wounded. . . . I shall take them all a packet of chocolate, or a box of matches, or some liquorice, it doesn't matter what, . . . the great thing

is to show that one is there. And nothing will prevent me from shouting 'Liberty for ever!' . . ."

Bigarreau shook his head.

" 'Liberty for ever!' . . . Why, man, you'll get yourself arrested!"

"I shouldn't be surprised. . . . They arrested Davel for less than that. . . ."

\* \* \* \*

On their knees, their heads thrust into open cupboards, Potterat and his wife were busily throwing out on the floor armfuls of clothes—skirts and trousers, etc. Every now and then, they stood up and wiped their foreheads: smiled affectionately at each other; then plunged their heads again into the depths of their respective cupboards. Over this task of theirs, they showed an almost childish joy and pride.

"Anyone could see how tidy you are by the way these cupboards are kept. Shirts, socks, trousers, drawers, vests, coats, everything in order in a separate pile."

"Well, I make a point of going through them thoroughly twice a year, the old things as well as the new."

"And yet just look at this vest, how the moths have riddled it with holes! Beastly things moths are! . . . Françoise, you'll have to get some wool the same colour and darn up these holes. . . . And, by the way, I shall buy some braces for these refugees. There is nothing more annoying than when they give way, and one has to hold up one's trousers with one's elbows. . . ."

"This cloak, it's almost a pity it's so pretty! . . . Oh, well, it doesn't matter . . . and besides, one doesn't want to give them only ugly things! . . ." murmured Madame Potterat.

In his eager enthusiasm, Potterat threw into the heap half a dozen waistcoats, with such vigour that one of them lighted on Madame Potterat's head.

"Do take care what you're doing ! . . . You've half blinded me ! . . ."

"I'm sorry ! . . . I can't see what I'm doing, with my head in this cupboard. . . . Let's see ? . . . Oh no, your eyes are all right, my dear, the same forget-me-nots as ever. . . . Ha ! . . . Here's Bélisaire's suit . . . that we had dyed for him, do you remember ? . . . Well, I'm glad that he can share in this too. . . ."

In burst Carlo, like a cannon-ball.

"What's the matter ? . . . What are you doing ? . . . Are we going to move ? . . ."

"No, dear, we're going to the station to meet the refugees from the north of France as they pass through."

"How jolly ! . . . Mother, may I give them some of my things too ?"

"Certainly, dear."

Then what a brushing up of collars, smoothing out of creases, trying the buttons to see if they were firm. . . . And Carlo, before two sailor suits, copied all these gestures exactly.

At three o'clock, the Potterats went out, carrying between them a basket covered with a clean cloth. Carlo followed, laden with some smaller packages. Madame Sauer was seen, also with a basket; and numbers of other people came along the corridors, laden with parcels in white or brown paper, with baskets and bags, looking half ashamed of their too visible generosity.

"Don't they look like ants carrying their eggs into another corner ?" said Potterat. "One feels as if one ought not to look at them. . . . Bah ! Why should we mind ? . . . We're not robbing our neighbours' hen-roosts. . . ."

"Father ! There's our head-mistress. What a big parcel she's carrying ! . . ."

"Be quiet, child ! . . . Big or little, all these parcels are respectable. . . . And no doubt, too, they have other



things that you don't see. . . . For instance," he went on, too full of it to keep his secret any longer, "in every pocket of these clothes I have put a little piece of paper with the words 'Courage! Sympathy! Condolences!' . . . It's little things like that which touch people most. . . ."

At the station, on the arrival platform, there was a motley crowd. Religious ladies and servants, professors and working-men, all furnished with baskets of food; gardeners in green aprons, their pockets filled with tobacco; little girls, carrying over their arms freshly ironed shirts; smart maidens, dangling a little parcel from one finger; labourers, commissionnaires, shopkeepers, shopgirls, and even a little group of blind men at the back of the crowd, in charge of a leader who could see. In this crowd there were no bickering, no shoving elbows. All these incongruous elements were united by the same human sympathy, as the many-coloured flowers in a meadow blend in the sun.

"Pardon! Excuse me!" And Potterat's friendly good-humour and patience carried him at length right up to the front of the crowd.

"Now, watch well, Carlo! You may be glad, sixty years hence, to be able to tell your grandchildren what you saw to-day. . . . Think of something kind to say to them."

Not far off stood a couple in mourning, who gazed sadly, from time to time, at a basket in which lay a child's outfit. Potterat leaned over and whispered in his wife's ear:

"Do you see those people, over there on the left? . . . They are the Michauds. . . . They lost their only son at the New Year, a boy of eleven. Now do you see, they're giving all his things. . . ." Presently he added: "You know this is just like that day when the Belgians came. . . . If it upsets me too much, I'll have to clear out, and you'll have to give the things. . . ."

Police-Constable Boulenaz, a giant with the face of a child, turned round.

"I know. . . . I feel just the same," he said. "Yesterday, the tears poured down my cheeks, I couldn't help it . . . and afterwards I felt I'd made such a fool of myself that I swore for about an hour."

They were still speaking when the train appeared, coming in with unusual slowness; from every window fluttered handkerchiefs, and from every doorway hands were waved, and heads thrust out like bunches of grapes. Just at first one could see nothing distinctly, but presently details forced themselves on the attention. An old man, hatless, and with his shirt open at the neck; some dishevelled women; children laughing gaily, as children do at the unwonted excitement of a journey; babies still in arms; their mothers, with drawn faces and tired eyes; and all those wrinkled cheeks, those terror-maddened eyes, sunk in greyish faces, all that frightful human misery passed slowly, slowly, as the train glided in. On each forehead the drama was written. . . . This old toothless crone seemed to be still gazing at brandished rifle-butts, at the dead bodies gathered up into carts. . . . This young woman, by her petrified immobility, showed the utter collapse of her courage and her hopes; even the little boys and girls had not yet recovered from their terror. Still vivid in all their minds was the remembrance of the blazing homesteads, the ruined churches, the pattering feet of their flocks and herds as they were driven away, the long wearisome journey, standing packed together in cattle trucks, that abominable time when they were herded together in a camp, surrounded by barbed wire, beyond which they could see the glitter of bayonets. . . . And the warder who announced to them disaster after disaster . . . and the bells which were rung for every fresh victory . . . the cold nights through which one shivered . . . and the soup in the mornings in which

floated morsels of green fat. . . . Their hearts dulled in time by long suffering, until at last they could no longer think of anything, scarcely conscious whether they were alive or dead, huddled in a crowd like sheep on the edge of a precipice, when the fog rises from the depths beneath. . . .

Before the sight of this misery the crowd remained quite silent, as if it had just seen a forest felled to the ground by the passing of a cyclone, too deeply moved to speak, or to exclaim, unconscious that this silent emotion is the truest sympathy. They were at peace, they had just come out of their warm houses. . . . And this was some of the wreckage of war. These poor people overwhelmed by misfortune. These poor old folks driven from their homes.

Potterat felt the tears rush to his eyes. He dashed them away with his fist. He could only repeat: "This is awful! It's awful! . . . My God! . . . Those poor children, those poor old men and women! . . ."

At the first moment, then, a sort of stupor seizes one which makes one stand with open mouth and folded arms and staring eyes, as if one had just had a blow on the head; and then suddenly the blood rushes from the heart again, rises to the cheeks, and to the ends of the fingers, which become active at once. . . . Then the crowd suddenly rushed forward. All the baskets and bags and parcels were frantically opened, and presently the train was bombarded from the platform, with a continuous stream of shirts, trousers, waistcoats, *petits pains*, oranges, sausages, dolls, woolly bears, chocolate, sweets, flannel, hats, shoes, buttons, cigars, pipes, newspapers, etc. There was a ripple of nervous laughter, and everyone said words that seemed to stick in his throat. The refugees took the things eagerly, glad to possess something once more, eager for this sympathy which rose all round them in a deep murmur, eager to

press the hands which were stretched out to theirs after everything had been given. One saw a baker go along the train with his biggest basket on his back filled with hundreds of *croissants* which he distributed. Boulenaz, the sympathetic policeman, unbuttoned his tunic, and drew from an inner pocket a letter, which he gave, blushing the while, to an old man, whose head nodded continually, like an automatic doll. And Potterat could be both seen and heard, as he ran along the train, with a dozen or so of pairs of braces, decorated with a Federal cross, hung over his arm, calling out:

"Who wants new braces? . . . You? . . . And you? . . . Here you are! . . . Three more! Two more! . . . That's the last! . . . Who'd like a pipe? . . . Who wants some tobacco? . . . Here you are, little girl, here are some sweets for you. Give some of them to your little brothers and sisters, . . ." and so on, until at last, "Oh, bother! I've nothing more! . . . Oh, here's my pocket-knife . . . and a pencil. . . . There you are."

To a man who thanked him warmly for a pair of braces, he said:

"You'll be rebuilding your house one of these days, my friend, and for stooping and lifting heavy stones you must have strong braces. . . . If you read, one day or other, in your newspapers, hard things about us, turn over the page. The real Swiss people, the backbone of the nation, are here to-day on this platform, with hearts full of sympathy and of indignation." For a long time he could not say anything more, then he burst out: "Damn them!"

At all the doors were children munching the crescents with their golden crust, their little mouths already smeared with chocolate. Their elders were unrolling their parcels. Some old men in shirt-sleeves were trying on waistcoats and coats. Everyone was talking.

"Where do you come from? . . ."



"From the camp at—at—— Ah, I can't remember the name."

"Did they treat you badly?"

"You see how we are. . . . And we've buried such a lot. . . ."

"And where are you going?"

"Wherever they take us. I don't know. We have to go where we're taken nowadays. . . ."

One bent old man, his chin covered with a sparse white beard, leant out and said:

"I used to be in the Chasseurs d'Afrique. . . . I had a medal. . . . They have taken it from me. . . . But we'll take it back from them. I have eleven sons and sons-in-law with the colours. . . . Eleven! . . . I'm seventy-seven years old, but after what I have seen, and suffered, I'd go to the front to-morrow, if they'd have me."

"I," said Potterat, "am sixty-five, but if they come to Switzerland, I'll bet you that . . ." an important official passed just then, . . . "that . . . You're going to have fine weather, I think, for your journey back to France. . . ."

A signal. . . . The faces in the windows were about to fade into the distance.

Potterat stepped back a little in order to get an impression of the whole scene. He wished, too, to send something of himself with these strangers. They passed. As the train moved on, he saluted those in it with wide sweeps of the hat. As the train glided past, he saw again the one-eyed woman, the laughing children, the pale creature with purple shadows under her eyes that spelt death, the lady with a sweet distinguished face, very dignified in her cheap cloak, the old Chasseur d'Afrique, old women, some with haggard faces and cunning eyes, others with calm prayerful brows, young girls with the restrained smiles of those who are ignorant of the fate of brothers, of lovers . . . all these human

grains, blown hither and thither by the whirlwind of war; . . . doleful attitudes, eyes gazing into vacancy, inexpressible suffering, clenched fists.

Every head in the crowd was uncovered as from the train hands and handkerchiefs were waved, adieux from eyes and hearts. *Vive la Suisse!* . . . Just as the last carriage was gliding round the curve out of sight, a man leant out of a carriage-window, a huge giant with flying hair, and yelled with all the force of his lungs to the horizon: "*Vive la France! Death to the Boches!*"

"There's one, anyhow, who is not so very neutral," said Potterat.

"How very tactless!" said a gentleman standing near Potterat. "What a pity! But for him everything would have passed off with perfect dignity."

"Tactless, do you call it?" retorted Potterat. "Perhaps it's a good thing on the whole not to be too polite. If one scratches long enough, the polish comes off, sooner or later. It seems to me that the poor fellow might plead extenuating circumstances. They weren't very tactful to him when they turned him out of his house with the butt-ends of their rifles." The gentleman said no more.

"You and Carlo go home . . ." said Potterat to his wife, "I feel too upset altogether to come in just yet. It'll quiet me down, I think, if I take a walk to Vidy and look up Louise. It's over a fortnight now since we've seen her."

With his arms crossed behind his back he set out on his walk. When he reached the cemetery of Montoie, he felt a desire to go in for a minute or two; it looked so peaceful under the still wintry sun, its white tombstones showing through the laurustinus bushes. The fountain in the middle was playing. In the trees the birds'-nests showed like black stains.

"Look out!" he called to a blackbird who was flying

swiftly about. "Just now cathedrals, and hospitals, and cemeteries are not the safest places to lodge a family. . . ."

The setting sun gilded the resinous trunks of the pine-trees, and lit up the distant Savoyard mountains. All nature was so beautiful that it saddened one; it seemed as if, whilst men were killing each other, Nature pursued unmoved her secret dream. . . . Standing before the tomb of his first wife, Potterat said:

"You are lucky! . . . Life's not much of a boon just now! . . . However, we did our duty this afternoon! . . . You would have liked to have seen that! . . . But it would have made you sad. . . ."

Then he came to Bélisaire's grave.

"Good-day, Bélisaire! . . . For once, you keep to the same old place. . . . Ah, you were wise to go when you did! We don't know what sort of a world of robbers we're living in now. . . . It's no longer a place for people like you and me. . . . By the way, I have given away your Sunday clothes, the blue suit, to an old man, the sort of man you would have liked, from whom those Philistines had taken everything. . . . You don't mind, do you? Hey?"

A step crunched on the gravel. Potterat looked round and recognized Rappaz, the gardener, who had lately lost his only child, a little girl of seven. They shook each other by the hand silently. Then, each looking different ways, Potterat said:

"You have come to see. . . ."

"Yes. . . ."

"What did she die of?"

"Oh, there were complications . . . meningitis. . . . It is hard! . . ."

"It is that! . . . On the other hand, they are spared much sorrow and suffering. In a way, it's almost better to die young. . . ."

"That's what I said to myself when I saw those refugees. . . ."

"And I, too, the same thing! I was just thinking a while ago, before my wife's grave, what a blessed deliverance, what rest and peace. . . ."

"Your wife's grave? . . ."

"Oh, my first wife, I should have said. . . ."

"Ah yes, of course, of course. . . . But these things seem to happen so quickly nowadays, you see. . . ."

Rappaz went away, and Potterat remained for a few minutes longer watching the last rays of the setting sun on the tree-tops, and listening to the fountain's gentle murmur, which the breeze sometimes stopped for a moment.

"Au revoir!" he said to his dead, as usual, and went on his way.

At the farm the one-eyed man from Pays-d'Enhaut told him that Louise was out.

"She said she was going to see the refugees pass through, and she took them a fine big parcel. . . ."

"Really! . . . And I've just come from there. . . . But in such a crowd as that it's easy to miss people. Well, well, I'm very glad to know that she went. . . . That's like my daughter! Tell her I said so. . . . Well, and how is everything going? . . ."

"Oh, we're slaving away as usual. We're clearing every corner of the land to plant all the vegetables we can in the spring. You see, if Italy closes her frontiers against us. . . ."

"You're quite right. It's just as well to be prepared. . . ."

On his way back, Potterat met once more the Cremets, dressed in black as usual, taking their little lonely walk between the silvery Lake and this town of strangers.

"Isn't the Lake beautiful this evening?" Potterat called out to them.

"Oh, to appreciate it fully one ought to live here."

"Well, aren't you living here?"



"Well, not exactly. . . . However kindly we are treated, still, you see, we are here because we can't help it. . . . Our hearts are elsewhere all the time. . . . We look at it, but we scarcely see it, you understand. . . ."

Guessing vaguely how these poor exiles felt, and turning at the same time to stare after a little woman dressed in the extreme of fashion, gaiters, a low-necked blouse, a marvellous coiffure, and a jaunty little hat perched sideways on top of her painted face, Potterat agreed:

"Oh, there's no doubt that after what you have seen, and what you have suffered, to meet these silly half-dressed little monkeys, like that girl who passed us just now, nearly knocking you down with her scent, isn't exactly in tune with your feelings. . . . And then, too, all these hotel people that we have here, these tennis-players and all those individuals who don't know how to get through the time at twenty-five francs a day, they don't seem to fit in with the war, do they? . . . The fact is that half these women who frequent the hotels lace themselves up so tightly that there's no room for any heart. . . . They ought to go into mourning, and put off some of their airs and graces for a time. . . . What use are they anyhow? . . . All the men in Europe are being killed, and in the future there will be neither weddings nor cradles. . . . So what's the good of painting their faces? . . . But, to change the subject, why don't you ever go to see any of these convoys of deported people at the station passing through?"

Cremeret shrugged his shoulders.

"We don't need to go and see what we have lived through ourselves."

"That's true. . . . Oh, but it is disgraceful! Robbing poor people of everything they possess, of all the comfort of life, their food, their wine, their fruit, fire, photographs, the butter on their bread, everything that they can see from their windows, all their little savings. . . . We're

going back to the time of Nebuchadnezzar, if I'm not mistaken. . . . Look here ! This is a piece I cut out of the *Feuille d'Avis* yesterday evening, in an article on *The Ninth Commandment*. It's taken from a book by a Lieutenant Joachim, called *The Ten Commandments of the Sword*, and it's authentic. Just listen to this:

' There is no room for pity in the heart of a soldier.'

' The soldier who gives up his cloak to a woman who is cold sins against his country. Better that a hundred enemy women and children should die of cold and hunger than that a single soldier should suffer.'

' You, soldiers, you must pass over the earth like a storm-wind. Others may speak of pity, but you must strike down and annihilate your enemies. You are the tragedians under the starry sky, and God Himself is the audience. . . .'

" . . . They have the cheek to think, you see, that the Supreme Being looks down with approval on their brutalities. . . . What I can't understand is why God doesn't, with one big kick starting from eternity, kick us all like a football straight into hell ! . . . This Joachim, now, I should just like to have him all to myself for a little while behind a hedge ! . . . I should first read a bit of his own book to him. Then I should roll up my sleeves, spit on my hands, and then, wouldn't I just go for him ! . . . I bet you he wouldn't be able to sit down comfortably for a year or two after I had done with him ! . . . Oh, it's a rotten world, I tell you ! . . ."

Cremet did not say anything: his wife merely shook her head. They knew only one thing, that they had been turned out of their home and country.

The same evening, when the two women had gone to see a neighbour, Potterat took up the conversation again. Somewhat overwrought, and in consequence a little frac-

tious, Potterat for once became aggressive, neutral, sarcastic. Cremet was reading the paper which lay on the table. He was indignant because it did not condemn more decidedly the enemies of Belgium, did not range itself more openly and fearlessly on her side, but contented itself with more or less ambiguous remarks and vague generalizations.

"You see, you can't very well understand our position. . . . If we seem to be trying to please all parties, we have very good reasons. Has it ever occurred to you that we are in the very heart of the fire? . . . That we ought to think twice before plunging our country, too, into the general conflagration? . . . That we have, here in Switzerland, three languages and two religions, that the Government has to balance all these conflicting interests; to soothe this one, to shut up that one's mouth, and, above all, to be careful not to offend the big ogre! . . . This neutrality is imposed upon us by our geographical situation. . . . Monsieur Dufournet, the Member of Parliament, calls it a neutrality of existence. . . . You understand, don't you? . . . This being the case, you mustn't criticize us, our politics, our newspapers, nor our coffee. Everyone has his own ways and customs, and everyone likes his own best, and knows best what suits himself. . . . Our rivers and streams flow in every direction. . . . It isn't very surprising that our individual convictions should do the same. . . . Then again, there is the question of getting in supplies, which is the same for all of us, no matter what language we speak, or what our religion may be. . . . There you have the real national question. . . ."

Cremet, somewhat overwrought too, by the long weary days of aimless waiting, and vaguely jealous of the security of this peaceful home, retorted:

"Belgium has paid the price of your safety. It's to us you owe your life. . . ."

"What? . . . Nonsense! If you had had universal compulsory military service like us, we should both of us have been safe and sound in this business. . . . Besides, I'll just ask you one question. Suppose it had been Switzerland that had been invaded, our towns burnt, our churches shelled, would you Belgians have come to our help? Hey? . . . Would you? . . ."

The Belgian was silent.

"There, you see! . . . You can't say 'Yes'! . . . It's everyone for himself! Our Government knows what it is doing, and why it's doing it. That may not sound grand, but it's only common sense. . . . If one's reason and one's heart don't agree, what's to be done? To live together in peace, there are times when everyone has to give way a bit. . . . Anyhow, I didn't make the world, thank goodness. . . ."

Cremet's only reply was a somewhat reproachful glance. Potterat jumped up.

"I don't know why I'm talking like this, Cremet! . . . I expect it's a sort of reaction. . . . The fact is, old man, I was terribly upset this afternoon. . . . I'm too soft-hearted altogether. . . . It haunts me all the time, that scene at the station! . . . I feel almost as if I were to blame for it somehow. . . . And it makes one feel a bit touchy, when one has expected great things from one's country, and has been disappointed: disappointed not in its kind-heartedness, but in its pride, in its unity of feeling, in . . . in . . . What was I going to say? . . . Well, what I mean is, that when one has been disappointed in a certain way, and one is a keen patriot, one suffers so much in hearing the country criticized by strangers, that one gives an opening for criticism oneself. . . . Look here, old man, don't let us talk any more about it! . . . We know each other, and respect each other. We, as well as you, are the victims of circumstances. It's a pity, but there it is. . . . Shake hands,



Cremet. . . . You are in exile, and you're my guest. . . . I take back everything I said."

Cremet took his pipe out of his mouth, and held out his hand. And once more he said:

"Monsieur Potterat, you are a good man. . . ."

That night, while he was undressing, Potterat was seized with an attack of sincerity, which his wife did not altogether understand.

"It's a nice state of things!" he said. "After having spent the greater part of my life in upholding law and order, to be obliged now, in obedience to these orders from Berne, to bottle up what one thinks, what one knows, to tell only half the truth, to juggle with one's conscience. . . . Sometimes I feel like shouting out all I know . . . but I dare not! . . . nobody dares! . . . We all compromise. . . . If you express yourself too plainly, the censor steps in with his big scissors. . . . We live in a continual state of uneasiness. . . . It would be far better, it seems to me, instead of keeping up this silence and these evasions, to discuss the whole thing freely with our Confederates. . . . Much better to open an abscess than to keep it closed and poison the blood! . . . Here we are, some millions of Swiss people, most of us splendid patriots, leading a perfectly wretched existence, since. . . . We all feel, every one of us, since our silence last August, that we've not done the right thing. . . . Ah, how I envy Joffre! . . . There's a man who can say white is white, and black is black! . . . It's a great mistake for a little country to lose its courage. . . ."

"Then do you want us to join in this war? . . ." asked his wife, terrified. "Do you want to see thousands of our young men crippled for life? . . ."

"Who's talking about war? . . . War is horrible beyond words. But if, last August, in accordance with our traditions, and our neutrality, guaranteed by all the Great Powers, by Heaven! if only we had said firmly, but

quietly and diplomatically, to anyone whom it might concern: 'You have invaded Belgium! You have invaded Luxemburg! Allow me to tell you, gentlemen, that Switzerland considers your conduct shameful!' . . . Just that! . . . Nothing more! . . . What would have been the result? Well, we should have an easy conscience now, and the knowledge that our hearts were in the right place. . . . And we should have been cheerful, knowing that we had been brave. We should have done our military service with pleasure. We should have shown to the world that we think of something higher than merely getting in supplies. We should have presented a united front to the world. . . . But just look at the way things are now! . . . As for war, there would have been no more likelihood of war than there is now. . . . less if anything. . . . We provoke no one . . . we take no sides . . . we merely state our opinion. . . . And hang it all, they did invade Belgium, didn't they? . . ."

"Look here, David, you take these things too much to heart. All we can do is to say nothing, but to help those poor refugees all we can."

"That doesn't alter my opinion. We could, and we ought to, do both."

"It's none of our business."

"That's a nice sort of thing to say! . . . 'It's none of our business!' . . . All the little nations are in the same boat. If justice and honour and respect for treaties which enable us to exist, are none of our business, I should like to know what is our business? . . . Oh, let me go to sleep! At least one forgets everything for a time. One goes back into nothing. . . ."

"David! Don't talk like that! . . . 'Into nothing!' What would the pastor say if he heard you? . . ."

"Well, he's not here," said Potterat, casting an involuntary glance round him. "I don't know what's the matter with me to-day. I said all sorts of silly things

to Cremet too. . . . I had begun to say something kind and sympathetic to one of those refugees to-day, and when I saw the magistrate close to me, I finished it up quite differently. . . . I'm a nice fearless kind of man, eh? . . . I'm only a tame cat about the house, that's what I am! . . . coming in for my meals, and quite content with that. . . . What is the matter with us all? . . . What we need is a little more of the blood of our ancestors in our veins, a little more love of liberty for ourselves and for others. . . . Really, I begin to think that it would be far easier to stand the fleas and the privations of a concentration camp than to be as we are. . . ."

He got into bed. The rain dashed against the window-panes, a cold February rain, half sleet. It was very pleasant to find a hot-water bottle at his feet. The thick curtains were closely drawn. Potterat enjoyed the exquisite warmth.

"It wouldn't take much to make me purr like a cat," he said. "My word! What it must be like at the bottom of those trenches! . . . Dragging one's feet through thick mud, walking on frogs, slipping in blood, feeling the fog creeping down your back, and chilling you through and through, no more able to change your shirt than an onion, to have to sleep with one eye open, and to keep a lookout for a possible attack of the enemy through the bushes with his bayonet between his teeth. . . . Nice, comfortable, luxurious sort of existence, isn't it? . . . I declare I am ashamed of this hot-water bottle! . . . All the same, I suppose I'd better keep it. . . ."

Madame Potterat was already asleep. The breath came evenly from her parted lips. Her husband felt jealous of this easy sleep, and he sighed.

"These women! . . . After all, they're very limited! . . ."

## CHAPTER XI

A THIN toothless old Savoyard woman used to come over regularly to the Potterats' to sell eggs, fish, and vegetables. She was very loquacious, and so amusing that they often asked her to come in and have a cup of coffee in the kitchen. Potterat loved to tease her, and she, with her sharp little quick-witted face under her gaufered cap, was quite a match for him.

Since the war, she had changed altogether. And this morning, drawing a letter from her pocket, she said:

"They tell me that you have an office for inquiries here at Lausanne. Would you kindly do me a service, Monsieur Potterat? . . . I have a letter here which I have written. . . . If you would please read it, and get it sent to the right people for me? . . . I shall go mad if I can't get some news. . . ."

The letter was as follows:

'To all whom it may concern.

'Since the 13th August, 1914, I have had no news of my son, Jean Marie Anthouard, private in the 4th Engineers, 13th Company, recently in action at Grenoble. We know that he was wounded, picked up by his comrades, and that then he had to be abandoned, because of heavy artillery fire.

'Since the 3rd September, 1914, I have had no news, either, of Claude Anthouard, my second son, private in the 3rd Infantry, 1st Company, 1st Battalion, who joined at Annecy.

'Any information concerning the above will be thankfully received by their mother, the Widow Anthouard, Neuvecelle, Haute-Savoie.'



Potterat seemed slow in reading it.

"I will do my best," said he, at length, in the severely official voice which he put on when he wished to hide his emotion. "I will forward your letter to Geneva with a line or two from myself. You may depend on me. . . ."

"Do you think it is true, Monsieur, what they are saying over in our place, that they finish them on the spot where they fall, kill them like dogs, with blows from the butt-ends of their guns? . . . The wounded, too, who might have been able to recover! . . . There are some who have heard them screaming, they say. . . . Oh, I feel as if I should go mad! . . ."

"This awful war!" said Potterat, unable to say any more. "It makes me sick!"

Madame Potterat offered her some refreshment.

"No, thank you, nothing, Madame," she said. "No coffee to-day, thank you. . . . Oh, if you only knew how awful it is to have no news. . . . You have your good man here, your son, everyone belonging to you. . . . No, you in Switzerland can't imagine what it is. . . ."

Madame Cremet joined the group when she heard this.

"Ah, I know what it is! . . . No, they don't realize it here. . . . I am a Belgian. . . . And I don't know anything about my children, either. . . . Four children, eighteen grandchildren! . . . There are some of our villages where every single person was killed. . . ."

Mingling their sorrows and anxieties, the two old women wept together. And seeing the great tears roll down their cheeks Madame Potterat began to cry also. Potterat turned his head away, wiping his eyes. Between two sobs one said:

"Truly the devil is passing through the land."

"He's not passing, he's staying."

"Oh! When I see the postman going round our road, and never a letter for me," said the little Savoyard, "I

go and hide myself in the cellar . . . and then I hear the neighbours shouting: 'A letter from Victor!' . . . 'A letter from my Casimir!' . . . I stop my ears. . . . And my third and last son goes next week. He says all the time: 'It's a good thing, too! You make me miserable with your crying!' . . . But to have lost two, and very soon perhaps the third also, is too much!"

"They'll be found for you, Madame, never fear," said Potterat. "We will begin making inquiries at once. I'll see to it, and I'll add a few words to your letter, as I said. . . . Oh, we'll find them, I promise you. . . . And then . . . (he did not quite know how to express his fear) . . . they were brave fellows, your boys! . . . if, by chance, they should be no longer on earth, it is at the top of the ladder you'll find them."

These words consoled the poor old woman somewhat. She had a momentary vision of her boys at the top of a ladder of gold, in a beautiful blue heaven, where the Virgin Mary, clothed in white, sat enthroned. Shaking hands with them warmly, she went off, bending under the weight of the basket on her back, while the Potterats stood gazing after her, and Madame Cremet sat with her hands on her knees, gazing into the past.

When Potterat had finished addressing the letter, he said to his wife:

"It's quite true, what she said about us Swiss, that we don't realize . . . we shall never be able to realize what war is. . . . We live too quietly. . . . And heaps of people here are amusing themselves just as usual. . . . Just look at those 'winter sports' places, where they have to refuse people, they are so full! The fact is, we don't do half enough for all these poor creatures. . . . On my way back from town, I'll buy some flowers for the Cremets . . . we'll put them at their places at supper. . . ."

Presently came the news that the Russians were in retreat. Potterat had a terrible fit of depression.

"That's very bad news! . . . They're on the run, evidently! . . . We'll have to look out! . . . I think I'll emigrate to Canada! . . ."

One day, Madame Sauer came in, much excited.

"Monsieur Potterat, I believe there's a spy on the fifth floor!"

"Zimmerli? . . . Impossible!"

"No, the flat opposite. . . . It's a woman. . . . She shows a light every quarter of an hour all through the night. . . . And a Savoy woman told me that there is known to be a nest of spies at Evian who do the same sort of tricks. . . . They are all working together, and they signal to each other across the Lake. . . ."

"What's her name?"

"Barbara Tannenbaum."

"Barbara Tannenbaum! . . . The very name gives her away! . . . All right! Leave it to me. I'll soon find out all about it quietly and discreetly. . . ."

With a job of this kind on hand Potterat was himself again. Soon after this, as he was talking over the affair with a few of his friends at the Café d'Etraz, Schmid the landlord leaned over to whisper confidentially in his ear:

"Spies? . . . They are everywhere now! . . . Listening, making notes, collecting all sorts of information. . . . And every now and then some of it comes in useful. . . . You know that case at Geneva? Well, in that it came out that they had made lists of motor-cars, of horses, and of the facilities for putting them up. . . . They had more information at their fingers'-ends than our own General Staff. . . . Well, now, I'm certain that one of them comes in here . . . a big fair fellow. . . . He sits there in that corner all alone, and stays for the best part of an hour, drinking half a pint of wine. He pretends not to be noticing anything, but in reality he takes in every word that is said. . . . He'll be coming along presently . . . it's just about his time. . . ."

"Would you like me to settle him for you? . . . I know the way to make these gentry take to their heels. . . . After thirty years in the Police, it would be odd if I didn't. . . ."

Presently the man, a sturdy-looking fellow, with an upturned moustache, came in and took his usual seat. Potterat in a leisurely way strolled over and took a seat at the same table. Very quietly he took from an inner pocket some papers, a notebook, and a pencil, and proceeded to make some notes, looking very serious, and from time to time casting sharp, searching glances across the table at his *vis-à-vis*, after each of which his pencil went faster than ever. Presently he said brusquely:

"Excuse me, Monsieur, are you travelling?"

A grunt which might have meant anything was the only reply.

"It's a jolly fine day to-day. A real spring day. Isn't it?"

A nod of the head answered him.

"You are a commercial traveller, aren't you? . . . Oh, no offence, I hope, . . . I don't mean to be inquisitive, it was just for something to say. I'm in the Police, myself. I've got here a certain number of descriptions of people I've got to look out for, so I have to study them every now and then, and keep my eyes open as I go about. I make some notes, too, now and then. . . ."

Precipitately, the man rose, paid his score, and departed. A roar of laughter rose from the habitués of the house.

"Did you see how I sent him off?" swaggered Potterat. "He took me for a detective. . . . Oh, I know how to track these fellows. . . . I'm watching one now at Chailly, and the day before yesterday I was on the Palud, talking to a friend, when my bird passed. So I said to my friend, rather loud, you know, 'Never seen a spy, haven't you? . . . Well, there's one, and a clever one, too! . . .' There was a crowd of people about us,



but he was the only one who turned round. I said to my friend, 'When you call out "Médor!" to a pack of hounds, it's only the one who is called "Médor!" who comes at your call.' See? . . . Now I am going to get to the bottom of this affair of signalling to Evian. I'll let you know what comes of it."

Zimmerli always came back from his office about seven o'clock, and after the time required to eat a cold supper, and change his black office suit for an old grey one which he wore at home, he sat down before his music-stand, and began to tune his zither. Everyone in the house was familiar with this hour of romantic effusion. When their supper dishes were washed and put away, Madame Mottaz, Madame Sauer, and Mdlle. Peytrequin, used to sit out on their balconies, and live over again the romance of their lives, reawakened by these old songs without words.

Zimmerli was not surprised to see Potterat appear in his garret. He thoroughly enjoyed a visit from Potterat, who was a kindred spirit in the matter of music. But this evening in particular, Potterat seemed rather pre-occupied. He wandered to the window, drummed with his fingers on the glass, drew aside the curtain, and at last he said:

"You have a splendid view of Evian from your flat. This window is as good as an observatory. . . . You have the moon and the wind all to yourself up here."

"Oh yes, it's a beautiful view. And just before rain, you can see every house across the Lake quite distinctly."

"Just so. . . . They can be seen only too well! . . . By the way, Zimmerli, isn't the flat opposite yours occupied now? . . . Rather a good-looking woman, isn't she? . . ."

"I've scarcely seen her. She goes out after I've gone in the morning, and she gets back before me. . . ."

Potterat folded his arms, and, fixing a stern eye on Zimmerli, said:

"She's suspected of being a spy."

"What? . . . This woman? . . ."

"Yes. We're not altogether sure yet. . . . I've been asked to find out about her. . . . Rather a difficult and delicate task, isn't it? . . . Now, your garret overlooks hers, and you must watch her."

"Certainly not! I shouldn't do such a thing for the world!" and Zimmerli rose, his celibate modesty deeply outraged.

"What's that? . . . But I don't think you realize what kind of person she is. . . . This is an affair of espionage. A light is shown here, and another replies. . . . It seems harmless enough, but they have a whole code of signals by lights. . . . They are carried on further, transmitted from one to the other. It may very well be done to order an attack. . . . Zimmerli, the lives of ten thousand men may depend on what is signalled across the Lake from the window of your next-door neighbour!"

Zimmerli was startled and impressed by these figures. And that a thing like this should have been going on so close to him seemed to make him a sort of accomplice.

"But what ought I to do?"

"Just watch, nothing else. In the evening, put out your own lights, leave your zither alone for a couple of days or so, and watch this young woman. . . . Listen to her moving about. . . . Notice whether she goes to bed, and if so, when? . . . Whether anyone comes to see her, and if so, whether man or woman? . . . Whether she turns on her electric light after she has put it out, and if at regular or irregular intervals? . . . and anything else that you think may help the authorities."

Quite concerned, Zimmerli set himself to watch, kneeling behind his window. Next day he reported that she moved about continually, that she turned her electric light on and off at least three times an hour. Potterat whistled through his teeth, and walked twice round the

garret. Then, stopping suddenly in front of Zimmerli, he gazed into the transparent eyes lifted to his.

"Zimmerli, this is undoubtedly spying of the worst kind. And it is going on so close to your rooms that you are very likely to be mixed up in any inquiry about it. That's the annoying part of the business."

Zimmerli sat down. Behind his glasses shone a quiet conscience, a little short-sighted, but quite serene. He murmured:

"I ought to have known better than to have mixed myself up in the thing at all. . . . This evening I shall take to my zither again. . . ."

"This evening," said Potterat, with stern authority, "you will resume your watching. It is really necessary. You can't establish a formal charge on the result of one night's watching only. . . . You must do it in your own interests; if you don't, it will seem as if you were aiding and abetting. . . . Besides, this woman may even be a man in disguise, a chemist, perhaps, engaged in making explosives. . . . Perhaps he has, hidden away at the bottom of a trunk, some incendiary bombs, asphyxiating gases, tubes of melinite. . . . An accident, and you are blown up, you and your bed, to goodness knows what height . . . we should find only your zither, hooked on to a cloud. . . ."

Terrified, Zimmerli took up his place at nightfall as before, behind his curtain.

On his part, Potterat had requested Sergeant Delessert to get him some information about this Barbara Tannenbaum. This information was excellent, as far as it went, papers all in order, a spotless reputation, rent paid regularly. She was a governess in a foreign family, and since the war, her occupation being gone, she had lived very quietly, in order not to exhaust her savings too quickly. . . .

"Absolutely nothing against her? . . ."

"Nothing."

"That's a pity. However, since nobody is absolutely infallible, with the best intentions in the world, my next move will be a little friendly call. . . . I'll soon find out whether she's all right, or not. There's still something queer about this light-flashing business."

So Potterat knocked discreetly next day at the door on which was pinned a visiting-card with the name 'Barbara Tannenbaum.' Light steps were heard. Then the door was half opened, showing a terribly swollen face, bound up, with drawn features, and eyes reduced to blue slits.

"Oh, you are suffering from toothache, Madame?" asked Potterat, his ready sympathy springing to the surface at the sight of suffering.

"Oh yes, Monsieur. . . . But it's beginning to go now. . . . Quite time, too. For three days and nights I haven't had a minute's peace with it. . . . I had to get up almost every quarter of an hour and change the compresses. I'm sure I must have disturbed my neighbour. You know him, I think? . . . Would you kindly tell him, from me, that he need not stop playing on my account?"

This little old lady was simply charming. But now Potterat felt that he must explain his visit in some satisfactory fashion. He had prepared an elaborate story of a sort of census being taken by a Hygiene Commission, and his being charged with the duty of examining the heating arrangements, and measuring the height of the ceilings, etc. This would give him a plausible reason for obtaining access to the flat. But now he dismissed this as being too complicated, and made use of the fact he had just learnt, to give a more natural reason for calling.

"I live on the third floor, Madame. . . . My name is Potterat, retired police-inspector. . . . My wife noticed your electric light going on and off repeatedly, and she said to me: 'I'm sure there's someone ill there. . . . You



must go up and ask if I can be of use in any way ! . . . It's perhaps someone who doesn't know the place, some lonely person ! . . . ' "

Mdlle. Tannenbaum was quite touched by this attention. She promised, as soon as she was well again, to come down and thank Madame Potterat in person for her kindness.

" Hallo ! . . . What a fine cat ! . . . May I stroke it ? . . . I used to have two, Citron and Mi-Fou, but Citron died, and Mi-Fou disappeared when we were moving in here . . . grief at leaving his old home. . . . Now, we haven't got one . . . we couldn't think of replacing Mi-Fou, we liked him too well. . . . " As he talked, Potterat advanced into the little room, and began to stroke and pat a grey cat, who arched her back with pleasure under his hand. " There, there, pussy ! . . . You can purr, can't you ? . . . " A hasty look round, while apparently devoting himself to the cat, was so satisfactory, that his last suspicion vanished. To begin with, he saw that an angle of the roof jutted out in such a manner that it effectually hid the view of Evian; and then also, this little interior, so clean, so neat, so prettily adorned with bouquets and souvenirs, seemed quite inconsistent with his suspicions.

" Anyhow, Madame, if at any time you should need help of any kind don't forget to send for Potterat, on the third floor, the door on the right as you go down, on the left coming up. "

When Potterat next saw Zimmerli, he said, somewhat cryptically:

" You may take out your zither again. . . . It isn't what we thought. . . . That lady opposite you is simply a charming woman of a certain age, who would like to marry a musician, a nice-looking man, with a little money in the bank, fond of his home, affectionate, and with a blameless past, naturally. . . . I believe she's got an eye

on you! . . . I warn you so that you may take precautions. . . .”

Zimmerli blushed. And for the first time in his life, after Potterat had gone, before taking up his zither to play ‘Moonlight in the Desert,’ he got up and locked the door.

To his wife, Potterat was still more cryptic.

“This is all you’ve got to do. . . . If she comes and thanks you, you must pretend that you know all about it. . . . Say ‘Oh, not at all! . . . Delighted! . . . Only too happy to . . .’ etc., you know the sort of thing? I can’t tell you the whole circumstances. . . . It’s a man’s affair. . . .”

“I hope it’s not improper, then? . . .”

‘Potterat’s Belgians’ were most popular. . . . Everyone wanted to entertain them, at least once. The Bigarreaus invited them and had quite a party in their honour, and many were the expressions of sympathy, and the maledictions on their enemies, that rose to the ceiling. While plying them with delicacies, Madame Sauer tried to draw them out on the subject of their frightful experiences. But they always told the story of their flight in exactly the same words, in voices quiet and toneless, much as if they were reading a passport. But after they had done so, there was no lack of animation in their manner, when they asked everyone, as they did, what news there was, and when they thought the war would be over? for everyone had said: by the spring, you’ll see it will be all over. To this people would reply, “Well, it’s hard to say!” and nothing more would be said.

• ‘In the spring!’ . . . Potterat had comforted them with this assurance all through the winter. And now the hazel catkins hung like golden caterpillars from the branches, the yellow primroses heralded the blackbird’s

song. And yet nothing had changed! . . . It seemed as if when all nature was gay, that the terrors of yesterday ought to vanish . . . that courage and hope would spring up again with the flowers . . . that the force of all this new life would be manifest in the world of men! . . .

Cremeret, however, could take no pleasure in the eternal miracle of spring. The Lake, in winter, with its tempests and its grey pall of clouds, he loved. But this smiling azure Lake filled him with longing for the long rollers coming in from the horizon, for the more virile sound of the sea. . . .

Jeanne Cremeret suffered less. Between her and Carlo there had sprung up an odd sort of playful teasing affection, in which the old woman showed her love for all young things, her pleasure in caresses and laughter.

As soon as the boy came back from school, they would play tricks on each other, running from room to room, and sometimes, in the twilight, sitting in a deep window-seat, she would tell him stories of the fishermen of her native town, of the village fêtes, when the young girls are resplendent as flowers, of the baptisms of her many grandchildren, and their names, Paul and Virginie, the twins, Léocadie, Beatrice, Yvonne, Françoise, etc., and the boy would try to repeat all the names without missing one.

"If you only knew the pleasure it gives me to hear you saying these names! . . . Every night I dream that my little grandchildren are dead. . . . But you don't think they are, do you? . . ."

"Not they!"

"Oh, say that again!"

"I'm sure they're not dead!"

"Oh, Carlo, I do fret so for them! . . . I can't help it! . . . The time seems endless! . . . endless! . . . You don't know what it feels like to have neither home, nor

linen, nor furniture, nor my pots and pans, nor my own ways about me! . . . Everything that one has touched, and felt, and seen, all gone. . . . Oh, we must go back again soon . . . we're homesick for our own place! . . . And they can do what they like to us! . . . In the grave, anyhow, we shall meet our loved ones again! . . ."

"No, no, you mustn't think of going back! . . . They would kill you! . . . You are all right here."

She kissed him, and he, who as a general rule, detested caresses, made no protest.

Every evening they read the papers sitting round the table under the lamp, each one buried in these tales of butchery. Suddenly Potterat broke out:

"Just listen to this . . . in a letter written from the front: 'I don't know what the others think, but as far as I'm concerned, the one thing that worries me is the question whether I shall ever have the courage to plunge my bayonet into a man's body, even if that man is called an enemy?' . . . Good Heavens! What an awful business it is after all! . . . The things one might have to do! . . . All the same, if it has to be, it must be done. . . . And when one has right on one's side! . . . When it's a matter of saving one's house, village, wife, children, country! And above all, when war has been declared upon you. . . . One's not attacking, one's defending oneself then, . . . besides . . . the whole circumstances are abnormal, and there's some difference between the actual thing and sitting listening to a sermon. . . . It's a disagreeable job, no doubt, but you'd simply have to close your eyes, so as not to see too much, and then . . . zip! . . . And afterwards you nurse him, and do what you can for him."

"Oh, how disgusting, David! Do be quiet! . . ."

"Disgusting, do you call it? . . . And to invade a country which has trusted to your signature, isn't that disgusting? You women will never understand certain



things! . . . Meantime, they are mowing down all the youth of Europe. . . . They must be wanting some good hay down there. . . .”

Cremet raised his eyes from the paper he was reading.

“They say here that this war will very likely last another three years! . . . Oh, it's too long, too long! . . . We must get back somehow sooner! . . .”

“Are you so tired of us then?”

Cremet shook his head.

“I'm a fisherman, you know. That is my trade. It's the only way I can earn my bread, and I've got all my things, there. . . . Here I can do nothing, only walk about.”

“My dear fellow, do you really suppose that you're going to find your nets and things there, just as you left them?” and Potterat let his hands fall with a resounding slap on his hips, “. . . and your boat moored to the pile? . . .”

“And what about me?” insisted Madame Cremet. “I have my garden to think of . . . it's the time to sow things. . . .”

“And where do you think your spades and rakes are now? . . . I expect that all you would find in your garden would be a “marmite,” but not the sort that you could boil a cabbage in. . . . No, no! Where the enemy has passed, it's well known that not much remains!”

“And what about our children?”

Potterat was silent. But after a minute or so, he returned to the charge:

“To go all that long way, only to find a heap of cinders. . . . And since I've adopted you, as it were! . . . Orphans need an adopted father. . . . No, I refuse my consent. . . . Just you stay quietly here, and don't you go looking for trouble.”

Potterat was absolutely sincere. He loved his guests. Since he could take no active part in the war, and yet felt so strongly surging up in him the instincts of justice,

the natural indignation of a good man against wickedness, the fact of helping these people seemed to lessen to some extent the remorse he felt as a neutral, whose country had made no protest, standing by with folded arms. Looking at Cremet, the innocent victim of a dastardly outrage, whose eyes had the tint of worn-out things, the melancholy of October rain, he felt inclined to clasp to his broad breast this silent being, wrapped in gloom, whom absence from his home had turned into a little broken old man. As he was going to bed, Potterat said to his wife:

"I don't believe we'll be able to keep them more than another three weeks. . . . They'll spend their Easter, you'll see, amongst the ruins of their home. . . . When one's as homesick as they are, it's no use trying to fight against it . . . it's too strong for you."

"It's an odd thing, this homesickness! . . . I'm sure I do my best to make them happy! . . ."

"No, it's not odd. It's very natural. . . . As I said to you the other day, I should like to see you, a thorough-bred Vaudoise, set down upon a foreign seaside esplanade! . . . Thank goodness, we are spared that. We can keep fairly cheerful on the whole . . . things are still pretty well with us. Of course we have difficulties, and business isn't so good, and we're losing some money, no doubt, but we are all here in the flesh. Our Cathedral is intact, our bridges are all sound, our roofs have their tiles, and our cemeteries are no fuller than usual. I can't imagine anything more dreadful than, after having spent a long life in hard work, and having saved up a little money for one's old age, to find oneself suddenly in the middle of the night, tearing along a frozen road with a bundle on one's shoulder, darkness in front, and one's house in flames behind one! . . . If that had happened to me, I should be suspicious, ill-tempered, spiteful, atrabilious, and asthmatic, I'm sure. . . . I should hate everybody who

owned anything. . . . If I saw a man, looking out of the window of a comfortably furnished house, fat and lazy, I should feel inclined, I know, to rush in, throw him out of the window, and take possession of his house. . . . I shouldn't care a sou for either God or man. . . . I should turn my back on them both. . . . Just think what it would be to have to begin again . . . to be like Bélisaire . . . when one was well over sixty, and had been accustomed to some consideration! . . . A man would need to be a saint to behave properly in such circumstances! . . ."

The next day, Potterat was walking along the Lake promenade with Cremet. The swans on the Lake, the seagulls flying in circles, the snowy crests lingering on the higher peaks, the fleecy clouds all stood out against the deep-blue background. Potterat stopped to look at it.

"Would anybody think, looking at that," he said, "that it could be possible for men to be killing each other all round?"

Cremet did not reply immediately. He walked on in silence, but with an unexpressed thought in his eyes. At last, timidly as a child asking permission from a schoolmaster, but still decidedly, he spoke:

"Look here, Potterat, I must speak plainly. . . . You are good and kind beyond words, you and your wife. . . . But this home-sickness is too strong for us. . . . We simply must go! . . . You can understand how strong the longing for one's own country, one's own ways, one's . . . well, one's own country calls! . . . You say, 'There's no hurry,' but it is not this place that I'm in a hurry to leave, but my own land that I'm in such a hurry to get back to. . . . If I knew that I should be shot the minute I got there, I should want to go all the same! . . . After all, it's our own home. In ruins or not, I feel I must go back and see what's going on. . . . And my wife, too, feels just the same. . . . She frets after her

house, and her pots and pans, and things. . . . She knows very well that she won't find them . . . but at any rate she will be in the place again. . . and perhaps she might find some little souvenir. . . . And if we must die, well, we could die better there! . . . But it will put more heart into us, only to be in our own country again! . . ."

Cremet had never before made so long a speech. When he had finished, he looked away.

"But have you thought of everything?" said Potterat. "Have you really decided? . . ."

"Quite! . . . We must go! . . ."

This was said in a tone which admitted of no argument.

"Well, I'm not surprised. I rather expected this. . . . But I think you're wrong! . . . Wrong in one way, not in another. . . . Oh, I understand exactly how you feel! . . . A man grows into a niche of his own, as it were, and the longer he lives, the more difficult it is to uproot him. And to be exiled at your age! . . . Oh, haven't I said over and over again that it must be terrible! . . . Well, if you really have decided, I suppose there's nothing more to be said. I shall be very sorry to lose you, but I should think it a sin to put any difficulty in your way. . . ."

Then they walked the rest of the way home in silence.

That same evening, as Potterat was dozing on the sofa, a light touch on his shoulder woke him with a start.

"Please look at this old thing," said Madame Cremet, "and tell me if you think I should be able to sell it here?" and she held out to him a gold chain with a medallion attached, on which was carved in beautiful filigree work a kneeling figure of the Virgin, encircled by a motto in interlaced letters. It had belonged, she explained, to her mother, and had been handed down for many generations as a family heirloom.

"When we had to run away, I had no time to pack anything, but I took this out of the drawer where I kept



it," she said. "Do you think it would fetch enough . . . for the journey? . . ."

"What's that you say? . . . For the journey? . . . Madame, what are you thinking about? . . . As if I should let you pay for the journey! . . . If you'd rather, I'll buy this from you for the price of the tickets, but as I shouldn't know what to do with it, I'll give it back to you."

"Oh, Monsieur! . . ."

"That's all right! That's all right! . . . It's a pleasure to me. . . ."

"Oh, how can we thank you? . . ."

"How? . . . Why, by just glancing at the thermometer, if you don't mind, and telling me how many degrees it registers? . . ."

"Ah!" sighed Cremet. "I hope the weather won't hinder us from starting on Monday. . . . I know it seems mad to go, but we must, we must. . . ."

They wandered restlessly about the flat; they packed, and unpacked, and packed again, their little portmanteau.

"What is the matter with you? . . ." said Madame Potterat once, a little crossly. "We are most anxious for you to stay with us, but you want to go. . . . Well, then, why don't you settle it once for all? . . ."

They ate very little these days, but furtively watched their hosts and the furniture. In this house everything seemed perfectly ordered. And in the streets people went to and fro, each one with a key in his pocket, each one with a home of some kind to go to. They had only to open a door and they were at home in their own houses, sheltered from wind and weather. These people had furniture, and clothes. . . . But what were *they* going to find when they got home? . . . The skeleton of their house, the walls cracked, the beams charred? . . . And the children? . . . They had heard so many dreadful things! . . . And yet they were obstinately set

upon going . . . upon knowing the worst at all costs. Better even, if it must be, to stand weeping before their ruined hearth, where they could reconstruct it in imagination, . . . than stay, not knowing. . . .

The Pottérats were silent. What could they say in face of this blind homing instinct ? . . .

At last the day was fixed. The train left at eight o'clock. The steep climb up to the station reminded the Cremets of the evening when they had arrived, tired out, stunned with terror and fatigue. Five months ago ! . . . And now they were going back into that hell ! . . . The combined call of race, of the place where they had been born and brought up, of a hundred half-forgotten things, drew them back irresistibly. Had they not been wrong to stay away so long from the blood-stained sunsets, the well-remembered roads, now trodden only by heavy military boots ? . . . They walked through the crowds unseeing, indifferent to all that was passing, crushed by the fear that had settled down upon their hearts. Poor little Mother and Father Cremet !

" Now, Carlo, hurry up ! Come and say good-bye ! "

Carlo was crying behind his mother's back. They all looked at each other.

" I don't know how to. . . . I can't tell you. . . . We shall never forget your great kindness to us. . . . "

" Why don't you stay with us ? . . . "

" Oh, it's not possible. "

" Come along ! . . . Get out of the train, and let us all go back to the house ! "

" No, no, we must go ! "

It seemed truly as if some relentless Fate were dragging them from that haven of peace to plunge them again into the black cloud of war, but there was their country, the graves of their dead, their garden, the sea. . . .

" Write to us, anyhow, and if you have need of anything be sure and let us know. . . . And if they worry you, threaten them with Potterat, of the Swiss Police.

. . . And if you can't get along, just you come straight back here as quick as you can. We'll keep your bed ready in the drawing-room. . . ."

"Take your seats, please."

They were already in the carriage, looking very much as they did when they arrived; the same frightened fugitive air, the rounded backs, the anxious glances, the hands meekly folded on their knees.

"Tell your countrymen that we think of them. . . . Tell them. . . ."

But the train was already in motion. Gently it glided out, with the two thin old faces so close together that they seemed almost one, as they waved their handkerchiefs out of the window, until the last carriage hid them from sight as the train rounded a curve. . . . They were gone. For a moment the Potterats stood gazing after them, feeling suddenly desolate, they hardly knew why.

At the Avenue des Roses they often talked of the Cremets; for them the couple personified exile, the the pangs of home-sickness; they poured out upon them all the pity which the war continually revived in their warm hearts. But from the wanderers, not a word came! They wrote to them, but they never knew whether the letters were received or not. And this silence seemed only to keep them more strongly in remembrance.

"I say, father," Carlo would say, "after the war is over, shall we go and see them, and take them money to build their house again?"

"Well, anyhow, we might go and see them."

And sometimes, when the rain beat on the window-panes at night, Madame Potterat would say, with a shiver:

"We ought never to have let them go, poor old things!"

"Perhaps not . . . but they would certainly have died, both of them, if we hadn't. And they preferred to die at home. . . . After all, it is instinct. . . ."

## CHAPTER XII

THE little local train sped onward, chasing the butterflies, passing a country cart with a round-shouldered driver. After the dreary hideousness of some outlying suburbs, with high blocks of flats dotted about over dreary wastes of bare building land, came the joy of open spaces bathed in sunlight, and the rhythm of the far blue hills. Potterat felt no inclination to open the newspaper where staring headlines announced the daily sum of human crime. This day seemed set apart for rest and calm. An old woman was nodding over her basket, some men were discussing the price of milk, a mother surrounded by three fat, rosy-cheeked youngsters pointed out to them the villages, and a corner of the Lake seen between two hills.

"Who painted your cheeks that lovely red, little ones, hey?" said Potterat, then without waiting for a reply, he jumped up, seized his rifle, and got out on the platform of the little station. Some voices murmured:

"There's someone going to shoot! . . . There's a fête at Bioley. . . ."

Potterat walked gaily along a narrow path between two hedges. What a profusion of flowers! Here and there, amidst gold and blue and white, were green patches of spring wheat. The larks soared up in the blue, fell like a stone, then launched themselves again, as if intoxicated with the joy of life, uttering their little cries, their cry of joy, above the jays chattering in the copse, above the midges, dancing madly in the sun, they also sending their little hum into the great silence of the fields. Potterat thought:



"It's absolutely idiotic to worry oneself about anything when there are such heaps of flowers. . . . Oh, let them kill each other as much as they like ! . . . The fruit ripens, the blackbirds build their nests, the plants grow up just the same. . . ."

Every little path branching off across the meadows, brought some fresh recollection to him. Here the brook, there the little pond of clear water, the little thicket of hazel-bushes.

"My word ! There's the place where, forty-five years ago, I upset the cart of wheat-sheaves ! What a chaffing I had over it ! They laughed enough at me in the village ! . . . and a fortnight after I was in the Police ! . . . I believe now that the whole thing was fore-ordained. . . . Anyhow, since then I've made my way in the world. I can hold my head up with the best of them !"

Once more Potterat regarded with admiration the clearness of the water, reflecting the threads of a spider's web, and the swallows overhead, against the blue of the sky. Fancifully he leaned over it, half expecting to see again the young man of former days.

"Hallo ! Do you know me ? Forty-five years is a good deal of a weight added on to one's shoulders ! . . . Look again ! . . . The hair is much the same . . . and there are no spectacles on the nose . . . the eyes are as bright as ever, the moustache as flowing, the cheeks as red ! . . . Ah, but the double chin ! . . . Yes, there's a good deal more thorax there, I must admit ! . . . But I'm not half a bad-looking fellow still ! . . . I don't look old ! . . . It wouldn't seem so very ridiculous for me to be offering a bouquet to a sweetheart even now ! . . . Courage, Potterat, you've got many a good time before you still ! . . ."

Delighted with the confirmation of the brook, he went on. And when presently he met some people, he saluted them with a gay ' Good-morning ! '

“ They’re Catholics going to Mass,” he said to himself. “ They’re quite right. Everyone ought to hold to his religion. If I can manage it, I’ll try to go to a service at Bioley. . . . Not that the weather invites one to such exercises, nor the things one sees on every hand. . . . On every stalk or branch there are pairs. These insects, . . . they don’t distinguish between Sundays and other days. . . . Some people say that they only live three days . . . if that’s so, perhaps they’re right to make the most of their time. . . . There is mercy for every sinner ! . . . ”

Presently the village came in sight, rising high above the fields. How often, both at Thierrens, where he was brought up, and here, where he had been employed, had Potterat driven along this same road returning from his work, pulling the reins to make the mare go faster. . . . By the way, what was the name of the old mare of Bioley ? . . . Ah, of course, Mélanie ! . . . And she was gone, too, killed by a rusty nail, which had got buried in her foot. . . .

“ Well, now, to come back to the present, who is there that I know now ? . . . Old Noverraz, who used to be a perfect glutton for work, and kept you mowing for three hours at a stretch in the middle of the morning ! . . . I can feel my back aching still ! . . . But the house that I sold him, he did pay a good price for that. . . . Retributive justice ! . . . And Suzette ? . . . I wonder if she’s still alive ! . . . And I wonder if the old sign-board is still up at the inn, with its ‘ Au Midi, c’est toujours Guex ! ’ . . . And Burnat, the syndic ? . . . Oh, he must be in his grave by now, he would be over eighty ! . . . Then there was a big man with a beard, and a little lame man, and Bernioud, the drunkard. . . . We used to call him Tomato. . . . Well, well ! When one knows the village toppers and good fellows, it’s all right. . . . Since they have done me the honour of making me

an honorary member of the Rifle Club, the least I can do is to come to one of their annual meetings anyhow, . . . and then, I wanted a glimpse of my native place! . . .”

Courtyards were swept; dunghills neatly piled up; flowers bordered all the vegetable gardens. Somewhere a hen had just laid an egg, and was loudly announcing the fact. A dog, lying in front of his kennel, his nose on his outstretched paws, opened an eye, and growled gently. Behind half closed shutters, here and there, people looked out. It was eleven o'clock, and Sunday, a June Sunday, of sunshine and perfume. Presently, the noise of balls rolling along a board, interrupted by another noise as of a shock, when the skittles were bowled over, then a burst of laughter, and then he came suddenly on a group of boys and young men, some with their hands deep in their pockets, others keeping the score in chalk, others drinking, their hats on the backs of their heads.

“Is there anyone at home?” called out Potterat, as he knocked at the door where old Noverraz used to live. Just as formerly, the bees were flying in and out of their hives, the foliage of the trees hung over the moss-grown walls, the pent-house shades over the windows seemed like hands put up to shield them from the sun. An old woman, very tall and thin, hobbled across the courtyard. Playing on her rounded back, her small head, and her voluminous petticoats, the sun threw an amusingly fantastic shadow of her on the ground, forming three circles, one above the other, the topmost like the dot of an ‘i.’ Her face was worn with long years of monotonous toil, and her hands, clasping a bowl of grain, were wrinkled and brown. She glided along the mossy wall, and between the garden beds, filled with lilies as white as her snowy cap, past the gnarled apple-trees, whose branches resembled her own bowed back. Presently she returned, her bowl empty of grain, which she had

scattered over the chicken-run, and filled with eggs, nestling on a bed of straw, over which she spread her blue-veined wrinkled hand to guard them.

"That's Suzette, the old servant!" whispered Potterat. "Why, she was an old woman ten years ago! She must have altered a good deal since then. . . . She was crotchety enough; I suppose she is impossible now. . . . All the same, I've got a very soft spot in my heart for old women! . . ." Potterat knocked again at the door, calling out as he did so, "Is anyone at home? . . ."

A man's step was heard coming along the flagged hall. Potterat, with the sunlight behind him, and Noverraz, his face in the full light, stood facing each other. Both exclaimed almost simultaneously:

"Do you remember me? . . . It was I who sold your father this house the year before you were married!"

"Of course I remember you, Inspector Potterat. . . . As large as life!"

They came into the kitchen, which seemed full of children.

"I often wondered how you were getting on. I remember your wedding. You married a young lady from Baulmes. . . . I needn't ask if it was a success. . . . Five children! . . . And such fine children, too! . . . Good-morning, Madame! I congratulate you. . . ."

The mother smiled, and went about her work, pausing to wipe the nose of one child, to scold another, to lift the lid of a saucepan on the fire, in which a sausage was cooking.

"Well, and how are you? . . . The syndic told us that you were coming down to shoot for us. . . . I was very glad to hear it. . . . My father hopes you'll dine with him. . . . He's expecting you. . . . He's not able to get out and about much now, but he'll be very glad to see you again. . . . Just for the moment, I'm rather tied



to the house. . . . I've got a cow and a calf sick. . . . And what do they think of the war in your part ? . . ."

" Well, we think . . . we think that . . ." Just at this moment a clattering of hoofs was heard on the flagstones outside, and a horse put its head in at the kitchen door, craning its neck round to look at its master.

" That's Mignon coming for his sugar. . . . Every day he must have his lump of sugar. . . . There ! . . . And here comes Suzette, do you remember her ? . . . She's as deaf as a post now. . . . Suzette ! Do you recognize this gentleman from town ? . . ."

Suzette lifted her trembling head with an effort, her still keen grey eyes looking out of a brown, wizened face.

" This is the one who didn't like too much reaping. . . . Oh yes, I recognize him, only he's fatter than he used to be. . . ."

" My word ! We've grown in opposite directions, you and I ! . . ." said Potterat, teasingly. " One of us is like a mill-wheel, and the other like a lath."

Someone just then called Noverraz out to the calf.

" Don't let me keep you . . . you go along ! . . . Good-bye for the present, Madame. . . . Good-bye, kiddies ! . . . Your father's house is the last on the left-hand side, at the top of the village, isn't it ? . . ."

" That's right ! . . . Well, we'll see you again this afternoon."

Potterat found old Noverraz very frail-looking, thin and bent. It appeared that since he had been caught in a hailstorm while at work, he had suffered agonies from rheumatism. The doctor could do nothing for him. . . . but in spite of it, Noverraz, still a slave to work, insisted on dragging himself out to the fields, got wet at times, and wore himself out till he was confined to his bed for three weeks at least twice a year. . . .

" He is so reckless ! . . ." complained his wife.

Feeling vaguely ashamed of his own physical robustness, Potterat strove to minimize it by talking of his growing shortness of breath, of his increasing trouble in going uphill, of his failing memory. . . .

"I assure you, sometimes I can't remember people's names for the life of me! . . . Quite simple names, too, like . . . like Schmidhauser, for instance. . . . I can think of it now, but sometimes it's two hours and more before I can remember it. . . ."

Giving free rein to his fancy, he discoursed eloquently about the Cremets, and the Belgian refugees generally, about the Russians, the Turks, the Serbians, Joffre, etc.

"Will you come to the table? . . . Here's the soup! . . ."

They had placed him with his back to the wall in the seat of honour. In front of him were the two men-servants, and Jenny, the unmarried daughter of the house. To the left was the window, which threw a green light on the ceiling, a blue light on the table; to the right the door, and near it, some whips on the wall, and the tall grandfather clock.

Madame Noverraz came and went, serving the stewed rabbit, the cabbage, the potatoes. As she went backwards and forwards, she talked.

"I wonder if all the things we hear are true? . . . All those dreadful atrocities? . . . Surely it isn't possible! . . . They print those things just to sell the papers. . . . In any case, we haven't seen anything for ourselves . . . and it doesn't do to talk too freely, you know, it might do us harm."

Potterat was indignant.

"You are very happy and comfortable down here," he said. "You have plenty of room, plenty of fuel, vegetables, milk, everything you need. . . . You may take it as truth that those photographs were taken on the spot and that those people are wandering about amongst the ruins. . . ."

Madame Noverraz put the cake on the table.

"Do you think they are likely to come here?"

"We don't know. . . . But it's evident they're not too confident at Berne, seeing that they've prohibited those lectures of M. Fuglisters."

"Well, I say, what's done is done . . . and talking about it won't mend matters. . . . Besides, can we help what goes on? . . . No. . . . Then it's much better to be silent about it. . . . One can't be punished for not talking. But if we talk too much, we might get into trouble."

Potterat wanted a second helping of the very excellent cake, so he said no more for the moment. Besides, it was difficult to realize, in these peaceful surroundings, in front of the coffee-pot, and the cherry-brandy, that there actually was a war going on. It all seemed so far away, so unreal. . . . A geranium was in bloom on the window-sill, the fountain in the courtyard threw its silver thread up in the sunshine, a cock crowed, perched on the gate-post.

"Well, they're far enough away at present, thank goodness!" . . . said Noverraz, wiping his moustache with the tip of his tongue. "But all the same, they're very powerful. . . . It's just as well to keep a still tongue about them. . . ."

A long succession of meadows followed the line of the highroad for a time, then turned off, and followed a hedge up towards a wood. A château was perched on the summit of the hill, then again more fields spread their carpet of green round the village church tower, and the roofs of the houses glittered in the sun like precious stones; beyond, the confused shapes and colours of the cultivated lands with browns, and yellows, and blacks, melted into a soft haze, and over all rose and floated a blue smoke. . . .

In one of these meadows stood the butts, with their

bull's-eyes of black, and above them those capital letters, which the little children point out to each other with pride, for they are the same as those on the first page of their reading-books: A.B.C.D. . . .

These letters can be seen from a long way off; every village has its own. And every Sunday afternoon, men may be seen coming to them, rifle on shoulder, across the ripening fields.

Having put on their red coats, the markers lie down behind the mounds, and soon the meadows resound with the noise of rifle-shots. They echo and re-echo in the depths of the woods, taking on something of the gravity of their solitude.

To-day it is the turn of the riflemen of Bioley, and it is the woods of Orjulaz, forming a background to the meadows, with serried rows of tall pine-trunks, and their sombre drapery of foliage above, which carry to the distant horizon the echoing reports of rifles pointed at the targets.

There are some twenty or thirty men assembled there, from young men scarcely out of boyhood, to middle-aged and even old men, all very quiet and sparing both of word and gestures, but indulging in a sudden burst of laughter now and then at one of Bernioud's broad jokes. All these men know each other well. They know how many cows belong to each, the height of each others' fences, who has one horse and who two, who has none, but goats instead, and all the hundred and one little details of village life and history; but there are too many present to discuss them now, and the shooting occupies all minds, especially as Potterat is shooting with them to-day—Potterat, who carried off the laurel crown once at Berne. . . . He has the crack marksman's eye, that clear piercing eye which half shuts at times, as if to focus distances, and fix them accurately on one point. In that pure air, that exquisite peace, near the hemlock



and sheep's parsley spreading their fairy lace against the dark background of the wood, Potterat forgot for the moment the nightmare of the winter, the newspapers, the Belgians, and entered thoroughly into the joy of the summer fields, and the pleasure of being once more amongst his old friends. . . . A bird suddenly burst into song close by. . . . Insects ran over his hand. . . . The sound of a bell came from somewhere far off. . . .

"They're just going to begin . . ." said a placid voice, as a man, sitting on a stone, sounded three times a long-drawn note on a horn, which was re-echoed from the woods and from the horizon. The creatures of the wood know well what that sound means, and the jay, perched on the topmost branch of a cherry-tree, near the targets, fled chattering indignantly. The markers take refuge behind the slope. Four men kneel in a row, the butt-ends of their rifles on their shoulders, their heads on one side, one eye closed, the other wide open, for it must look along the barrel, right on to the black round which is the bull's-eye. The rifle-barrels are absolutely motionless, so calm are these men, so easily, yet firmly, seated on one heel, the chest thrown well forward, in perfect equilibrium. The trigger is released slowly. . . . Ah! . . . Pahud has the shakes! . . . That's what comes of taking aim too long! . . . Suddenly, the rifleman recoils as if he had received a blow, the barrel of the rifle points heavenward, where a light puff of smoke may be seen rising. Installed under his big umbrella, the secretary has seized his pencil. . . . Tu-u-u! again sounds the horn. At once the markers behave like demented poppies. . . . Each of them has a long pole with a palette fastened at one end, black on one side, white on the other. This they hold up in front of the target, opposite the little hole where the bullet passed through, over which they paste a patch of paper. Sometimes

instead of holding it in one place against the target, they wave it backwards and forwards like a pendulum; that means a miss: the ball has gone wide of the mark.

"Barbezat, two! . . . Guex, three! . . . Panchaud, four! . . . (Four is the highest score.) . . . Pahud, a miss. . . ."

Everyone laughs, for all know the cause of Pahud's misfortune.

As soon as one group of marksmen has fired, another takes its place. Marc, Henri's son, a novice; the syndic, a big man with an immense neck; Polien, the mole-catcher; and Martinet, the milkman. And the Orjulaz woods echoed and re-echoed.

"One! . . ." grumbled the syndic. "Damn! I knew I should have bad luck. The first person I met this morning was Suzette! . . . How could anybody shoot straight who had that scarecrow still in his eye? . . ."

The horn sounded, the poppies rushed madly about, at intervals, and the intermittent firing went on. . . .

"Now," Potterat addressed himself, as he stood watching with folded arms. "It's up to you to let them see what you can do! . . . If you fail, after coming all this way, they'll think very little of you! . . . And the wife will feel so proud, too, if you bring home a prize! . . . Courage! . . . Three 'pendulums' running for the milkman! . . . He'll be able to set up as a clock-maker soon! . . ."

At last it was his turn. Potterat, after depositing his coat and waistcoat on some bushes, took his place deliberately. His braces, gaily embroidered with Federal crosses, seemed to sink into his fat shoulders. As he knelt down gravely, and inclined his head to one side over his rifle, the pointed end of his moustache seemed to laugh up at the sky, and his arms, like those of a big baby, his plump torso, and the straining strap of his trousers, looked incongruous enough.

"He's a powerful lump! . . ." said Pahud.

"Pan! . . . flah! . . ." echoed from the wood.

The poppies ran forward. Potterat mopped his forehead. "Why don't they hurry up? . . . What are they so long about? . . ." he murmured to himself. "And yet I have aimed and got a bull's-eye at six o'clock, at a small target too! . . . Those villains have recognized my shots, that's what it is! . . . there's something sharp and decided about them, . . . and they are going to play the fool with me! . . . I say to myself when I'm firing, 'You may be neutral all right, but you can fire all the same, as if you had something in front of you, and don't you miss it!' . . . Ah, that's all right! . . . 'Potterat, four! . . . Four to Potterat! . . . Same again, bang in the eye. . . . Potterat, four! . . . Four to Potterat! . . . Now another in the same place! . . . No, Potterat, three! . . . It's this blessed sun gets in the way of my aim. . . . Now the last. . . . Four again? . . . Potterat, four! . . . Four to Potterat! . . .'"

Presently it was time to rest and eat. They sat down on the grass, and unpacked from the baskets bread and cheese, and bottles of wine. And the markers, Godoille, who had buried three wives, and Vinoche, a little fat, red-cheeked man, ran up to have a drink.

"Have a glass, Godoille?"

"I don't mind if I do! . . ."

"And you, Vinoche?"

"Well, I won't say no! . . . Who was it made that last series of four fours and a three?"

"It was Monsieur Potterat here!"

"Yes, it was I! . . . And that three, you know, was almost a four: It's in the family. . . . An uncle of my cousin's aunt at Assens was the best shot of the whole Canton. . . ."

They ate, and drank, and chatted. Potterat related his experiences in the way of spy-catching, not without

a little exaggeration. But how remote these people were from all that was going on in the great world! Potterat, a tactful person, could not help feeling this, and he soon turned the subject, saying carelessly: 'But one never knows how much to believe in these war stories. . . .' Then they talked of things nearer home, more tangible things.

"I like those big red and white cows. . . . I think they're splendid! . . . And they are the right colours for us, red and white. . . . They go with our mountains and our green pastures. . . ."

"Are your calves coming on all right, Octave?"

"Oh yes, they're getting on fine! . . . I don't think I shall sell them before the autumn. . . ."

And their eyes wandered critically over the serried fields of clover, lucerne, wheat, and barley. Presently some men went for a stroll to look at the crops more closely, and Potterat, too, lit a cigar, and strolled off by himself. The wild roses climbing over the privet hedge held out their blushing faces to the bees. Potterat bathed his hands in a little brook, singing the while snatches of Vaudois songs. He felt himself a Vaudois to the core, here in the heart of his beloved country, with its good fruitful earth, its spreading trees, a little like himself, its gently sloping hills, unbroken by sharp peaks or bristling rocks, its kindly climate and soft air . . . a land of bushes without thorns, of vines, of forests, pasturages, orchards, and everywhere, glimmering through the trees, the soft blue of the sky, and the deeper blue of the Lake. Up in the clouds, somewhere a lark was carolling . . . happy larks, for whom heaven is one nest, and earth another, where distant bells chime, where the sun's rays dance, and sweet odours rise.

"I'll tell you what it is, Potterat!" he said to himself. "You talk a great deal too much. . . . You've always got more to say than anyone else. . . . Just look



at this land of yours ! . . . It's far too beautiful to be exposed to the risk of invasion ! . . . It was made to be neutral ! . . . They're quite right ! It's better to hold one's tongue ! . . ."

Presently the firing was resumed, and he took his place again, lying full length this time, on that land he would not for worlds expose to danger. And now he had a more difficult task; no longer had he in front of him the comfortable square target, its black bull's-eye standing well out against a background of white, but a blue splash which represented the head and shoulders of a soldier. Three times out of four the young man with budding moustaches has touched the tiny target. . . . Look out, Potterat ! . . . He felt himself in a cold sweat. Wriggling about on his stomach to get lower in the earth, he planted his elbows firmly amongst the clods. And when the syndic maliciously called his attention to a magpie which was flying across the sky with jerky flaps of its striped wings, he muttered, "Beast !" . . . and closed his eyes not to see the magpie, which brings bad luck.

"It's your turn, M. Potterat."

He brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"After all, this ball's got to go somewhere, and it might just as well go into that little man as anywhere else. . . . Just try to imagine that with your four shots you are going to clear Belgium of the invaders, to restore their cathedrals, and bring back their brave dead !"

"Pan ! . . . flah ! . . ." once more comes back from the woods: the markers run up. . . . Another hit ! . . . and another ! . . . and the last, for the left eye ! . . .

Then his blood begins to circulate again, his features relax, and Potterat gives a big shout of laughter.

"There you are ! . . . I'm afraid of nobody when I'm lying flat on the ground with a gun in my hand ! . . . If they had a hundred or so like me in the trenches the war would be finished by to-morrow night. . . ."

"You're lucky to head the list of prize-winners."

"My wife will be pleased. . . . Women don't much care for old men who can do nothing but wheeze. . . . There's nothing like coming out first in a contest to revive their love."

The chimneys of the village were sending up trails of smoke as they came back in the evening in time to bring in the cows. People appeared at the doors of the houses, and called out:

"Who's won first prize? . . ."

Soon the news was all over the village, and when Potterat appeared the children danced round him, holding each others' hands, and singing:

"When the king of the range went by,  
Ho! ho! ho! 'neath his canopy,  
Gaily I lifted my bright black eyes,  
To greet the marksman who'd won the prize."

Until supper was ready, Potterat strolled about, his chest well out. He wandered along the little paths between the hedges, and presently met some young girls, with arms intertwined, humming:

"To love is not a crime,  
God does not forbid it! . . ."

"You have very pretty voices, young ladies. . . ."

They blushed and giggled. They wore their white Sunday fichus, their cheeks were glowing with health, their hair was neatly braided, and their lissom figures were alluring.

"Are you the king of the range? . . ." said one of them. "Oh, that's too bad of you! My *fiancé* was hoping so much. . . ."

"Who is he? . . . Oh, the young man with the curly hair? . . . Well, he'll win next year. And these other young ladies? . . . Where are your young men? . . ."

"At the war."

"At the war? . . . Not really at war?"

" Oh, it's just as bad ! . . . They're away for so long ! "

" Be patient. They'll come back one of these fine days soon. And then you'll be able to sing duets again. On the other side of the Jura it's very different. There they are at war, if you like ! . . . Yes, we ought to be very thankful that we are spared . . . " and Potterat looked at the peaceful scene before him, the smoke curling lazily upwards, the heavy ears of corn, the distant ridge of hills, carrying the eye on to the Alps, towering in the distance, and said, ' We are spared much ! ' . . .

Half-past seven ! The children in crowds, with their hands behind their backs, and their mouths open, round-eyed, stared at the band, which was playing a lively air. It was exciting . . . even some belated cows going back from the drinking-trough, gambolled as if dancing to the music, . . . and everybody laughed. Then the voice of the President of the Rifle Club was heard. He spoke of Potterat, who stood to attention in his best manner, admired by all the women. He then placed the laurel crown on Potterat's head, and presented him with a coffee-pot. Next, the young man also received a laurel crown, and a cheese-grater. The President spoke of the troublous times in which we are living; he too, like all the rest, was ready to ' protect the frontiers,' etc. Then the band struck up another lively air and marched at the head of the procession to the Inn, while the rest of the crowd looked on; old men leaning on their sticks, their sons with grizzled beards, grandsons with black moustaches, great-grandsons sitting on the ground beside the cats, and grandmothers, mothers, young maidens. It was a pleasant scene. The merry tunes of the band swept through this peaceful well-being, bringing to every heart a vague sense of fuller life, a desire for adventure. . . . Those sonorous brass instruments, the rhythmic sound of the marching feet, the swinging arms, the flag, the ' King of

the Range ' with his laurel crown. . . . There ! . . . they had all disappeared into the Inn, and the old men sat down again on their sun-warmed benches, amidst the flower-pots. . . . The tinkle of the fountain was again distinctly heard. . . . Through the open windows of the Inn, they could be seen, as they took their places round the table in the big dining-room, hung with fly-blown portraits. Two serving-maids were carrying in huge smoking dishes. Someone said:

" Is this some of Marc's veal ? "

Another voice was heard:

" For my part, I don't think it ever pays to go against the orders of the authorities. It's unreasonable to criticize the people at the head of the Government. . . . "

The voices buzzed on; they drank healths, clinking their glasses against each other; the voices grew louder; cigars were lit; and presently Potterat, asked for a speech, was on his feet, his chest well thrown out. From outside, of course, all he said could not be heard. But he began by saying that he was delighted to be once more in the midst of real old Vaudois folk, who love their country and are part of it; who produce, while others destroy. In the towns, he went on, people are excited, they read too many newspapers, they lose their heads. . . . To listen to each of the belligerents, one would think that they all were right, and that God marched under the banner of each. " Now we have the privilege," he went on, " of looking on at the conflict from outside. . . . This day has done me good. It has plunged me, as it were, right into the heart of Nature. And Nature is neutral. . . . Our Government knows it well. As somebody truly said just now, ' It is dangerous to think we know better than the authorities, those at the top.' There have been times, I confess, when I have allowed myself to criticize. . . . But I was wrong. . . . Since I have been here with you all, you who are the backbone of the



race, its very soul, if I may say so, you, so moderate and calm in your judgment of events, I have felt that your way was the wisest, the best, the only one, in fact, for a wise man to follow. . . . So I give you as a toast: The peaceful fields, and those who cultivate them! All honour to them! . . .”

Was it really Potterat who spoke these words? . . . It was. The spirit of the place had taken possession of him. How could he speak otherwise when he was smoking such fragrant cigars, drinking such excellent wine, and when through the windows came the scent of new-mown hay, and the rustle of the lime-trees in the evening breeze? . . . They applauded him loudly. The band played the Cantonal March. Then they sang the Vaudois song, ‘A new day rises, men of Vaud!’ . . . At last the ceremony was over. On the market-place, Madame Noverraz joined Potterat.

“Would you mind taking back a parcel for me? It is some clothes for the refugees. Here we have no chance of seeing them. . . . There are two dresses, a cloak, some stockings, and a dozen handkerchiefs. . . . What you told us to-day at dinner touched me so much. . . .”

Potterat took the parcel, and as he did so, he thought:

“Good Heavens! I excite them, and they calm me! . . .”

Soon he was on his way back to the station, the parcel under one arm, his prize under the other, his rifle on his shoulder, and the laurel crown still round his hat. The sky was full of stars; the earth dim, and wrapped in darkness; but up there, the mysterious fields of space, the Milky Way, like a scarf, thickly powdered with worlds, and stretching away to infinity. . . . It made Potterat thoughtful.

“So many stars up there, and down here so many men burrowing like moles amongst the beetroots! . . . You weren’t very brave to-night, old boy! . . . Ah well, one

can't spend one's whole life shaking one's fist. But I haven't altered my opinions a bit. . . . I think just the same as I've done all the year. . . . We're quiet, peaceable folk, after all, . . . we can't be heroes all the time. . . . We must eat, and drink, and sleep, . . . as a matter of fact an intelligent man has to adapt himself to his audience. The country is country . . . and the town is town. . . . What can one do? . . . Besides . . . there are days when one feels neutral. . . ."

Just then a shooting star sped across the heavens. Potterat waved his hand to it. "Bon voyage!" he said.

It was July. Plucking up courage, the café near the flats set its gramophone going once more in its gardens; the little arbours were filled with drinkers. Compelled by the hardness of times to give up their usual abode, gaily-dressed damsels were walking about, making eyes even at staid fathers of families. . . .

Retrenchment, for some, soon developed into positive poverty. A widow, who had a flat on the fourth floor, and took three boarders, had now lost them. She fell ill, and one could see her son, in his student's cap, washing up dishes. No more pupils came to the music-teacher on the second floor, there were no more scales. Sometimes a short piece was played, but without spirit. . . . Potterat would shake his head at the sound of these melancholy notes. . . . One morning, the postman left a fifty-franc note at the flat on the fourth floor, and another fifty-franc note at the second-floor flat. . . . From whom? . . . The widow thanked God; the pianist jumped over the music-stool. That same morning, as Potterat watered his plants, he whistled loudly some martial airs. Suddenly he stopped short:

"What in the world are you whistling?" he said to himself. "'Sambre et Meuse,' an air forbidden by the military authorities! . . . Do take care! . . . My word!

One is dazed by all these prohibitions and regulations. . . . One would think we were boys, or fools, without any brains or common sense. And we are beginning to be perpetually watched, and advised, and threatened, and lectured. . . . By-and-by we shan't be able to put our noses outside the door without permission. The absolute last word in neutrality! . . . 'Show the cream, and hide the pepper!' That's the idea! . . . And we must mind and be very polite to everybody! . . . We must learn to salute consuls and ambassadors! . . ."

Potterat, as a matter of fact, although it did not affect him in the least personally, had regarded the Censorship from the first with a deadly hatred. The very word infuriated him. All his traditions, as a good Republican, were in favour of that liberty which poets had sung in many songs which he knew by heart. It was with him an article of faith as much as his religion. And now this forbidding of a public lecture announced by the Belgian, Destrée, another lecture on 'The Martyred Towns.' . . . An alarming title, they said, subversive! . . . Then Vachon, the gentle old artist, with his white beard, had been ordered, at Berne, to take his limelight views apparatus to pieces, and to leave the town, he and his flowing necktie, until people had come to their senses again. Forbidden, too, in many other Cantons, was the lecture given by a Swiss who had been present at the sack of Louvain.

Now this lecture had been given first at Lausanne, and Potterat had heard it, and had been moved to tears. . . . And continually books were being seized, pamphlets, postcards with the Proclamation of General Joffre to the Alsatians. . . . Who were they afraid of? . . . Potterat indignantly unbosomed himself to Delessert.

"What do you think of all this nonsense?"

"Oh, I don't think! I do as I'm told! . . . In the beginning, when I had to watch the bookshops, and

confiscate the pictures of Reims Cathedral, it used to annoy me. But now I don't care a straw. I have my orders, and I obey them. If the Censorship gave me orders to confiscate the Bible, I would go right into the pastors' houses. . . ."

This word 'orders' rather pulled Potterat up short; the word so much respected, so often repeated, so willingly obeyed. Orders! Even on hearing the word, he had involuntarily drawn himself up, thrown out his chest, and clicked his heels together, mentally, so to speak. . . . Was it possible that he, Potterat, brought up in the tradition of obedience to orders, was now going to rebel against them? . . . Had he not already done so in showing so plainly, through all these long months, his thoughts and feelings, his revolt, as an honest man, against neutrality, without stopping to consider what effect his attitude might possibly have? . . . The authorities—the Authorities, mark you, Potterat!—had called for Silence! Attention! Chut! Sh-sh. Lower, not so loud! . . . Not that: something else! . . . and he, Potterat, had jeered, criticized, rebelled openly, and cursed those who had broken their word. . . . He realized suddenly the gravity of his fault.

"And what good does it do?" he asked himself, "these bursts of valour? . . . Not a bit! No, at Bioley you were much more sensible; you took the right tone, and they applauded you. Wasn't it Abraham who said, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' . . . We can't police the whole of Europe! . . . M. Hoffmann explained that to us the other day: the private citizen has to adopt the opinion of his Government. How do you think things would go on otherwise? Switzerland is neutral by treaty, so the Swiss citizen must be neutral. He must neither blame, nor praise. Even if all the rest of the world, except ourselves, is violated, we must remain neutral. . . . That's how we must think of our duty. And if it seems strange



to you, it's because you are not truly Swiss. If you are really Swiss, then you must not think it strange. Yes, my boy, you are getting into bad habits. . . . You argue, you think things out for yourself. . . . You are a free lance. . . . You must change. . . . You must come to heel. . . . Mum's the word. . . ."

"Father, let's have something on the gramophone? 'Sambre et Meuse'? . . ."

"You young anarchist! . . . Don't you know that that is forbidden to military bands?"

"It's forbidden outside, but not at home. Besides, a gramophone isn't a military band!"

"H'm! Well, perhaps you're right."

"David! Don't listen to the boy! Don't do it! Sooner or later, you know, they'll stop your pension if you go on like this! . . ."

"Right you are! We'll play nothing then. . . . Blest if I can understand things here a bit! In Holland they have no Censorship; nor have they in Denmark. Only ourselves. The other day, at Fribourg, a policeman snatched a toy Swiss flag from a child, because the 'carrying of emblems' is forbidden in the precincts of the railway-station. They began by being afraid of other people, now they are afraid of us. But there I am again, criticizing as usual! . . . I withdraw all I said, and all I was going to say. In the end, I expect they're right. . . . That doesn't hinder me from thinking, all the same, that all they have done to make good little performing dogs of us has been retrograde. . . . Little presents in time of peace, little frowns in time of war, a mixture of both, alliance by marriage, investments and withdrawing of investments, gold chains. . . . Oh, I've seen it all coming. . . . There was too much lace about. . . . Damn it all! Here I am, beginning again! . . . Now what is the use of exciting myself, and worrying myself into a fever? . . . We've

done our duty. We've had some Belgians, and you knit . . . and if they tell us to be quiet and say nothing, well, that's all right ! . . . Let's stop sitting in judgment on the world, and quietly read our newspapers: ' Marc Bassin, farmer of Granges, victim of a recent accident, thanks most warmly the charitable friends who lent a helping hand in ploughing his land, sowing it, cutting wood, and many other kind acts of sympathy.' "

" Aren't our own people good ? . . . "

" Only too good ! . . . One reads constantly of instances like this. Here again, just listen: ' Strayed, about a month ago, a Griffon dog (female), wearing a collar, with the name and address of the owner. As the animal was enceinte, its owner was advised to wait, as the dog would probably return with its puppies. But taking into account its fidelity, as it has not turned up, the undersigned has lost all hope of this, and begs those who may have taken it in to give her news of it, dead or alive.—Mdlle. Muller, Chemin des Jumelles.' She's quite right, by Jove ! to go into mourning for her dog. But why should I go into mourning for the rest of the world ? It only gets one into trouble, and doesn't do the slightest good. I'm going to change my ways."

Delessert, his friend and successor, consulted again, fortified Potterat in this decision. When Potterat asked him:

" And this Censorship ? . . . It gives you plenty of running about, doesn't it ? " the sergeant replied:

" Oh yes, of course, I've a good deal of running about to do, but I'm paid for that. . . . If everybody commanded, nothing would be done. . . . It's not for people in our position, and with our pay, to put our little sticks between the spokes of the big men's wheels ! . . . And it's war-time, after all, you know. To make one's living, one has to stand well with all foreigners. It isn't you and me that will keep the big hotels going after the war.

Of course we sympathize with the Belgians; only, if one says so, it offends the others, and those others are strong. Sensibly enough, we're inviting those who have a ready tongue and pen to shut off the steam. . . . You'll see that no more people will go singing all over the place 'Liberté chérie, seul bien de ma vie' . . . but ordinary songs like 'Amour, que veux-tu de moi?' and that sort of thing. . . . it's more neutral. . . . Oh, you have to manage things in this world. When one plank gives way, you seize another, hey? . . . Look here, Potterat, to go into opposition will only bring you disappointment and bad luck. . . . People like ourselves can't afford to be in the minority. . . ."

"You take life in the right way, hey? . . . You know how to get along!"

"You bet! . . . I'm all right. I'm neutral. Orders, counter-orders. . . . I carry them all out as I'm told. After all, it's a bit harder to govern a nation than to milk a goat. . . ."

"My word, I shouldn't wonder but you're right!"

There are times when it takes very little to change a man's mind. Potterat had never concealed his tastes: he loved good food, sunny days, pleasant thoughts, to feel himself on good terms with everybody, and above all, to stand well with the authorities. He had been thoroughly miserable for months past. And what had been the good of it all? . . . He might just as well go back to his former happy state of mind. As he went along to see Bigarreau, he thought that he had never seen the sloping fields looking more beautiful, nor such an exquisite light on the pale-blue waters of the Lake. He gazed with intense pleasure on the grass, the lilies, the foxgloves, roses, and the fruit-trees. Amongst all these Potterat became himself again, jovial, easy-going. He leaned over the flowers to smell their fragrance, he tasted the plums and apricots. . . . They brought some

baskets and picked fruit. . . . " It's better to hear ripe apricots falling than shells ! . . . We haven't been very heroic, but we have been spared ! . . . Ruin and devastation ! One would think twice, ay, sixty times, before provoking that sort of thing. . . . I, who was so strong on protesting last year, I begin to think better of it. . . . Everyone for himself ! That's the law of the world !"

Bigarreau fixed astonished eyes on his friend. Then he said:

" Well, it's the way to be comfortable . . . not to mention that we give clothes, and take in refugees !"

Up in the cloudless blue sky, stretched like a cloth with its corners resting on the mountain-peaks, a red-brown hawk was hovering.

" What do you want ? . . . It's no use your coming down here, we're too big for you. . . ."

Later, as he sat in his own home, with an apron round his waist, stoning the apricots for jam, while the syrup simmered in the big pan on the fire, he said:

" How fine these apricots are ! They're like little suns. Oh, we have a fertile country !"

" Why do you keep saying that sort of thing all the time ? . . ." asked Carlo.

" Because I love it ! . . . If you saw faults or defects in your parents it would make you sad, wouldn't it ? . . . But all that is past and gone. . . . Everything's all right now."

" At school, they're always telling us that we must be patriotic."

" They teach you that ? . . . That's a pity. Patriotism, like love, is not to be taught; it comes naturally."

Sitting in his little garden, Potterat congratulated himself on his new attitude.

" I'm too excitable, that's what it is. The least thing carries me away. . . . And what good is it to be too



generous? . . . One's only taken advantage of. . . . No, it's all very well to get hot about things in winter, or even in spring, but in summer it makes one ill."

The honeysuckle that had been brought from Eglantine Cottage to No. 5, Avenue des Roses was in blossom, climbing side by side with the beans, trained on high sticks planted in the borders.

"They'll always come in for soup," he said, "not to mention that they wouldn't make at all bad cover if one had to fire from behind them. . . . Bother! I've got this war on the brain! . . . Oh, I wash my hands of all these worries. . . . I'm not responsible, and I'm not going to care! If I had got my marching orders, clearly and definitely, wouldn't I just have gone like a shot. . . . They would have talked about me. . . . Liberty and country! . . . They would have given me a commission before long for the things I would have done. . . . But I wasn't asked to go. Other nations are fighting, and, after all, it's their business. What would be the use of protesting? . . . The only result would be that we should be gobbled up in our turn. . . . To protest! . . . You only see that sort of thing in a play. We don't do these heroic things nowadays. . . . We look after the cash-boxes now: that's the most important thing. . . . Pride is out of date, it's a relic of the Middle Ages. . . . Besides, people know very well which side our sympathies are on. And we're hospitable. We may not lift a finger or say a word when all these atrocities are committed, but at any rate we try to bind up their wounds as well as we can. Oh, we're not half bad, after all! . . . It was Cremet who made me feel so indignant. He was so grand, so defiant, that old man. . . . Ah, bah! Let the Belgians look after themselves! . . . I'm Swiss, and I'm here, and all our monuments are untouched as yet. . . . And I've served the Government for over thirty years; it would be a pretty business if I became disaffected now. . . .

And haven't we had compliments in foreign newspapers for all the good we've done? What do we want more? . . . Since when is it a good thing for people of no importance to lift up their voices? . . . We are men, after all, and good men too, when we look into the matter. . . ."

Such were the reflections that the summer sunshine brought to Potterat's mind. On Sundays they went up to Sauvabelin, and strolled about on the Terrace there, admiring the wonderful view. Everything was so fresh and beautiful that Potterat ceased listening for the sound of guns beyond the distant hills. As they walked through the woods his wife discoursed on the blessings of peace, denounced the nations who were at war as un-Christian, and pointed out that even if they were not all equally guilty, the horrors and miseries that war brings in its train are so awful that it is enough to make one's blood run cold only to think of them.

Soothing words, which were in harmony with the sweetness of the summer air, with the beauty of the distant panorama. Some families had been dining under the trees; while the children danced in a ring, the mother replaced the glasses in the basket, and the father lay flat on the grass, sleeping, his hat over his face to shade him from the sun, his moustache still white with the cream brought by the youngsters from a neighbouring farm. Potterat taught Carlo how to make a whistle from an elder-branch, and a flute from a hemlock stem. Suddenly he said:

"Do you see that boy over there with the College cap? . . . He is just about your age. In four months more, when the schools open again after the summer holidays, you will be going to College too. How will you like to be learning Latin?"

"Not at all! Those old languages are no use nowadays!"

"That's where you're wrong. They are not spoken

any more, certainly, but they are very useful, all the same. Don't you think that I should have been something better than a police-inspector if I had only known the dead languages? . . . With my abilities, I should have risen to a very high position, and perhaps been one of the bigwigs, a syndic, or a Commissioner of Police. . . . One has to conform to convention, and fall in with the manners and customs of those round you if you want to succeed. So you will study hard, Carlo. We are very proud of you, your mother and I. I hope you won't disappoint us."

"Oh yes, Carlo, you must study well," put in his mother.

"No, I won't! . . . I don't want to study!"

"You'll obey your mother, sir! You have only one mother! . . . Are you going to study, yes or no? . . ." thundered Potterat.

"Oh, well . . . yes."

"I should think so!"

At the setting of the sun, they turned homewards, arm in arm. The paths, overhung with tall trees, were bathed in soft green light. Before them other people were strolling along, some couples, fat, tired mothers, and young girls in white shoes and lace-trimmed skirts. . . .

Next day, they resumed the jam-making. No one knew what the winter might hold for them. . . . They couldn't have too much. Potterat took a hand of course. He read out receipts, and gave advice. Presently a dispute arose: he wanted to make a preserve of raw currants, his wife vaunted the superior quality of cooked jelly.

"Bigarreau gave me some of their raw currant jelly to taste the other day, and it was just like fresh fruit. . . . All right then, make a pot of each! . . ."

Kneeling on the floor, he strained the juice from the fruit, poured it into a jar, added the sugar, and

stirred the mixture carefully with a long-handled wooden spoon. Madame Potterat laughed.

"If only people could see you, David, with your waxed moustache, and your military look, your big chest, and your woman's apron, and your fingers sticky with sugar! . . ."

"Well, they didn't want me to be a hero, so I may as well be a cook. . . . And perhaps we can give some of this jam to the refugees when they are going back to their own country. . . . It will be a help to them. . . . There! You see how it's stiffening up already. . . . It gets almost as firm as ice in a little while. I'm glad it's going well. . . . And bother the war! . . ."



## CHAPTER XIII

ON the evening of the 10th July, Potterat ran down the staircase in his slippers to his letter-box, ranged—in a row with eleven others—along the wall in the entrance hall. He took out the *Feuille d'Avis* and remounted the stairs. Settling himself in the depths of a big red arm-chair, drawn up near the window, he read the burial notices, the telegrams, very uninteresting that evening, and various items of local news. Suddenly a headline caught his eye: 'Report of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry.' . . . He read a few lines, then gave an angry shout.

"The devil! . . . Françoise, put down your knitting-needles for a moment, and listen to this. It makes one's blood run cold. . . . How they could! . . . How they could! . . . In the twentieth century! My God! It's terrible! . . . And against peaceful, inoffensive people . . . people like ourselves, who thought they could sleep in peace in the security of their treaties! . . . Damn! I'm no longer neutral. . . . I can't be neutral in the face of things like this! . . . 'The village of Battice was pillaged and burnt on the 6th August, 1914. Thirty-five persons were massacred.' . . . 'Bouxhe-Melen counts more than eighty victims.' 'At Nicheroux the church and the Communal Schools were destroyed. The population, their hands bound, were shut up in the church of Fleches-Soumagne.' . . . 'At Berneau, nine persons were massacred, and out of one hundred and fifteen houses, only forty-three are standing.' . . . 'With the exception of a few houses, the whole of Barchon was burnt, and twenty-

seven persons, including women and children, massacred.' 'At Trembleur, the hamlet of Blegny was completely destroyed, and a great number of the inhabitants put to death. The Abbé Labaye and the Burgomaster of the village were shot before the church, which was then burnt.' . . . 'Foret, Olne, and Soiron are amongst the most cruelly treated villages. They are in ruins, and many of their inhabitants were shot.' 'At Lizse, Rombroek, a farmer, was shot, with his son and servant-man.' 'At Haccourt, Colson's farm was set on fire, the farmer, his son, and his daughter-in-law being shut up in the farm, and burnt alive. The curé of the parish, M. l'Abbé Thielen, was killed. Sixteen persons altogether, of whom many were women, were massacred.' 'At Heure-le-Romain, the curé of the parish, M. l'Abbé Janssen, and M. Léonard, brother of the burgomaster, were taken behind the church, tied together, and shot. Seventy-two houses were burnt, and twenty-seven persons killed.' . . .

"My God! . . . There are about two columns of that sort of thing, and that is for the province of Liége alone! . . . Just to think that it might have been Avenches, Moudon, Lucens, Goumoens, Préverenges, Cheseaux! . . . And magistrates, pastors, mayors! . . . Belgium, to me, is almost like another Switzerland. . . . And those terrible asphyxiating gases. . . . And the *Lusitania*, with its two thousand passengers, sunk, amongst them forty children, scarcely five years old, not to mention three Swiss citizens! . . . Horrible! . . . Have people got consciences, or not? . . . Does justice stop short at the frontier? . . . Neutral, neutral! It's easy to say it, and the Government perhaps may be all right, but for any man who has a heart in his breast, it's impossible for his blood not to boil with anger! . . . Damn it all! I withdraw every word I said at Bioley! Every word! do you hear? And I throw myself from this moment openly

on the side of the Allies. I had intended to give up doing anything to show where my sympathies were, but this very evening I shall go to the station to see the wounded pass through. I shall take them wine, cigars, papers, letters, sweets. . . . Yes, for the future I don't care how much I compromise myself. I'm going to shout out before everybody, 'Vive la Belgique!'

Madame Potterat wore a very anxious face.

"My dear David, there you are, working yourself up into a fever again . . . and we were so happy these last few days. You believe every word that you see in the newspapers. . . . How do you know whether it's true or not? . . . Those burnt villages, those murdered people, have you seen them?"

"Have you seen America? . . . Besides, I've heard what those Belgians at Regamey's told us . . . and ours too. . . . when they described that red wall on the horizon. . . . They are good people, these Belgians, for the most part, and not given to exaggerating things . . . in fact, they haven't enough imagination. . . . They're all the better witnesses for that. . . . And this Commission of Inquiry was composed of people above suspicion, people like our prefects, collectors, Councillors of State, and so on. . . . If we had had these awful experiences, what would you say if the Belgians said, when they read about them, 'We did not see anything'? . . . The question is, has Belgium been violated or not? H'm! . . . The victims tell the truth, because it is to their interest to do so, but supposing there should be in their stories a grain of falsehood, does that justify us in rejecting all the rest? . . . These declarations, made before the Commission of Inquiry, are signed and countersigned, and sworn to before God and before the world; it is a document for posterity, and I say that any Swiss who can doubt the truth of this Report ought to be put in a sack and thrown into the Lake. . . . One can't doubt

the evidence of people who have been murdered for no apparent reason. . . . I repeat 'Vive la Belgique!' . . . Shame and disgrace on those who talk of 'scraps of paper'! Shame! Shame!"

"David! I don't know what will happen to you if you begin to insult people like this! . . . Do you know that there's a fine of five thousand francs and six months' imprisonment now, for anyone who says that a nation, or an army, or a part of an army, has been guilty of disgraceful conduct? . . ."

"What's that?"

"It's true, I tell you! . . . You never read anything that isn't about the war. But there are things happening in Switzerland, all the same. Look here! I kept the paper. There it is, at the top of the second page: 'Anyone who publicly vilifies, with a view to influencing public opinion, or who holds up to hatred or contempt, either by word of mouth, or by writing, or by pictures, any foreign nation, ruler, or government, is liable to six months' imprisonment, and a fine of five thousand francs.' . . . Now you see what will happen if you go shouting at every corner, 'It is disgusting!' 'Shame and disgrace!' and the rest. . . ."

"'Publicly,' it says," rectified Potterat, somewhat sobered. "This is not in public. Who is there to hear?"

"But you talk just as freely as that going along the road, and in the tram."

"Then if one's Government disgraces itself, the good citizen must keep his mouth shut? . . . Supposing I were to break a contract, or get into my neighbour's house, I should be sent to prison at once; but Governments, apparently, can do this sort of thing with impunity! It's the usual thing, I suppose. 'One law for the rich, and another for the poor!' . . . My God! It's enough to drive one mad! . . . Now that a man can't say what is true without being punished for it as severely as if he



had been guilty of swindling, well, for us humble folk, who are honest, and who love justice, there's nothing for it but to sit at home and smoke. . . . To say nothing, no matter what happens! . . . Oh, very well! All right! They needn't worry any more. Go on, my friends! Violate neutral countries, burn, kill, do what you like. . . .

"And we, who have always stood up for Liberty and Country; we, whose motto is, 'One for all, all for one!'; we who sing 'Before God alone we bow the knee!'; we are told 'Silence! . . . You mustn't abuse the invaders! . . . Six months' imprisonment, and 5,000 francs fine, if you do!' . . . Oh, it will drive me mad! . . ."

"When one is not in the Government, there are some things that one can't always understand. But there's no need to rush into anarchy because of that. . . ."

"Anarchists! . . . I know very well where the anarchists are to-day! . . . But I mustn't say anything more. I respect everybody. I take off my hat to invaders and traitors. . . . I spoke of shame and disgrace just now, but I take back my words. I withdraw what I thought. I withdraw my convictions, my feelings, my opinions, my words past, present, and future. . . . Invasion of Belgium? . . . Not a bit of it! They mistook their way, that was all! . . . *Lusitania*? . . . A mere accident! . . . Villages burnt down? . . . Carelessness! . . . Civilians killed? . . . An oversight! . . . There! I'm silent! I'm silent! I'm silent! I'm muzzled!"

"Really, David, you are unreasonable! That law is intended to prevent agitators from stirring up trouble. It isn't intended to be applied. . . ."

"I don't care whether it's applied or not. It exists. That's enough for me."

"And you still intend to go down to the station? . . ."

"Certainly! . . . I'm going with Zimmerli. It's not yet forbidden, I hope, to throw a few sweets and things

to some cripples, or that! . . . And now let's have supper. We're still alive. That's something to be thankful for, anyhow. The dead are dead. So much the better for them!"

It was midnight. Potterat yawned three times.

"They say the train won't be in until about 2.40. . . . That means that we must stay up all night. Well, I'll walk about a bit. . . . Let's have a smoke. . . ."

Three knocks, one after the other, resounded from the ceiling of the flat below.

"All right! All right!" said Potterat, who was walking up and down like a caged lion. "I'm in slippers. No one has any right to object."

Solemnly, the blows were repeated. Running to fetch his stick, Potterat repeated the knocks with concentrated fury, after which he sat down, giving up the struggle in disgust.

"Oh, let's be fair," he said to himself. "When the old lady objected to my cornet I held out, because she was in the wrong, seeing that I was playing in ordinary recognized hours. But at midnight, people want to sleep. That's natural! . . . You can go to sleep, old lady, and dream of the lover who never came for you. I won't budge again. . . ."

Sitting with his arms folded, Potterat went over again in memory that first occasion on which he had gone to see the passing through of the badly wounded, some months before. Again he saw the immense crowds, kept back from the platforms by policemen, whose helmets barred all means of access to the trains. Some words were exchanged from time to time between the people and the police.

"We're not going to do them any harm. . . ."

"But surely we may offer a few chocolates to the wounded? . . ."

And women held up their baskets for inspection, containing white packets. One could easily see that these big fair policemen were not over-pleased with their task. They answered half-heartedly:

"Don't push like that! . . . Stand back there, please! . . . You can give your chocolates another time! . . ."

"Another time? . . . When? . . ."

The police are very popular. As a rule, at public fêtes, the people willingly facilitate their duties. But in this case, it seemed to the people incomprehensible that the police should apparently feel so differently from themselves. In vain had Boulenaz gently remonstrated with Potterat:

"You ought to understand, after thirty years in the Police, that an order is an order! . . ."

Nonplussed for an instant only, Potterat then retorted, with a sweeping gesture of his arms:

"The will of the people is sovereign, even in war-time! Besides, these railways are ours. . . . And anyhow, what harm can possibly be done by our coming to salute the brave men who have fallen for their country? . . . None. . . . Rather the reverse."

Boulenaz said nothing more, but contented himself with a shrug of the shoulders. Exasperated by this contemptuous gesture, Potterat squared his shoulders, and cried out:

"Now then! Women and children to the back, please, with the baskets. Men to the front. . . . Come on, you fellows! . . ."

And headed by Potterat's broad chest, a sudden rush of the crowd made a big gap in the line of policemen. . . . To Boulenaz, glued against a wall, Potterat said good-naturedly, as he passed:

"Charity comes before even the police-force!"

For a long time afterwards Potterat would relate this little incident with pride. For one brief moment, had

he not represented the mighty will of the people, the voice of the populace? He always finished up by saying:

"Since then they leave the station open. . . . They know better than to attempt that sort of thing again! . . ."

At ten minutes to two o'clock, he went up to call Zimmerli. On the top landing he struck a match: 'Barbara Tannenbaum.' . . . "Good Heavens! I've come to the wrong door!" Groping his way across to Zimmerli's door, he knocked peremptorily.

"What is it?" said a sleepy voice.

"The police! Open! . . ."

"What? . . ." said the voice, still sleepy.

"Open, in the name of the law, I arrest you! . . ."

"H'm! What is it? . . ." Then suddenly a frightened voice was heard. "Yes, oh yes! I'm coming! . . ." and Mdlle. Tannenbaum had jumped out of bed, and the sound of her little pattering feet was heard as she came running across the floor. Then the keyhole sent out a ray of light into the passage.

"Who is there? . . ."

"It's nothing, Mademoiselle. It's only me! . . . I was playing a joke on my friend here. . . . We are going down to the station to see the wounded pass through. . . . Excuse this early reveillé."

The two men went down the staircase as quietly as they could.

"Zimmerli," said Potterat, "it would have been only polite of us to have asked Mdlle. Tannenbaum if she'd care to come with us. . . . In emotional times like these, proposals are made much more easily. . . . It would be fine, wouldn't it, to get engaged under the eyes of the wounded? . . ."

"How dark it is! Pitch dark. . . . One can't see an inch before one!" replied Zimmerli.



"Oh, that's because of your emotion! Love is blind, they say."

Presently, they were walking silently through the darkness.

"Zimmerli, can you realize it all?" said Potterat suddenly. "Bugles, and drums, and bells ringing, announce war . . . a war that no one wanted. . . . Still, everyone goes willingly. . . . They march off singing. . . . Then three days after, they are in a perfect hell! . . . Marching, fighting, killing, blood and wounds everywhere. . . . Men shouting and fighting madly. Then silence. . . . You know nothing more for a time. . . . Then you wake up with an arm or a leg gone, and you are a prisoner of war amongst strangers who don't know a word of your own language. By-and-by, you are able to begin to creep about on crutches, . . . or, if you are blind, you begin to grope your way about, with your hands stretched out in front of you, groping, groping, in that darkness which is going to last for the rest of your life. . . . This sort of thing goes on for eleven months, eleven long months, far from your home and family, your friends and your country. . . . Eleven months! And now you're going back home. What a home-coming! . . . You'd think your heart would leap out of your breast with joy! . . . Often in the night when I can't sleep, I have imagined these home-coming scenes, . . . and I assure you, I have been quite overcome, quite overcome! . . . It takes my breath away! . . . Sometimes, I've even had to get up and walk about for a bit. . . . I don't tell my wife, because it would only frighten her, but this war has started something wrong inside. . . . I have terrible shoots of pain every now and then, and a kind of tingling. . . ."

"Yes, it gnaws at one! . . ." replied Zimmerli simply.

Slowly, slowly, with the infinite care of a mother, fearing to hurt her sick child, the long train glided in,

filled with the mutilated soldiers, their pale faces smiling from rows of stretchers, hung one above another. The crowd welcomed enthusiastically these glorious remnants of men, who had offered their lives so freely, but of whom Death had taken only a part. . . . Outstretched hands, kindly eyes looking into their eyes, confused shouts, everyone offering that sympathy, which wells up from the depths of the human heart in such moments as these. . . . Nothing individual, no consciousness of me and thee, something nameless, and simply human, gratitude, pity, admiration in one strong rush of mingled emotions. . . . This enthusiasm, too, seemed to reveal the wounded to themselves, raised them out of the grey depths of depression, the long dreary nights of exile and pain, and set them up on pinnacles of heroism, lighting the way for their brothers still fighting in that other night of horror. . . . But yesterday peasants, with their petty little interests, humble citizens, unknown to fame, . . . to-day they were held up to this crowd as shining examples of the splendour of willing sacrifice, the greater in proportion as they had been brought low. Wonderful to relate, it was they, now, who seemed to be blessed and privileged beyond their fellows.

Potterat ran excitedly from carriage to carriage, pressing their hands in his strong, warm clasp, throwing tobacco and chocolate to all around him, drawing letter after letter from his inner pocket.

"Look here! Read that when you are alone! It is from Switzerland, and from a Swiss man. . . . Where did you fall?"

"On the 10th August. A leg shattered by a shell. . . ."

"Good Lord! And we make such a fuss when we have to go to the dentist! . . . And did they treat you kindly in hospital?"

"Oh yes, just the same as their own men."

"And don't you bear them any ill-will for having taken off your leg?"

"Good Heavens, no! . . . What can you expect in war?"

"Well, you're a long way better than I am. I have all my limbs and yet I'm boiling with rage. . . ."

A Senegalese touched Potterat's shoulder:

"You French?"

"No, Vaudois. And you? . . . You're a negro, aren't you? But that doesn't matter a bit. I'm very fond of negroes. . . . Have some chocolate? . . . You can eat as much as you like, you needn't be afraid. Ah! . . . You have only one arm! . . ."

"Light one! Light one!" grinned the negro, showing all his white teeth.

"Ha, ha! The one that is left is always the right one, hey? . . ."

Potterat, however, kept in reserve one letter which it had taken him long to compose and write. To whom should he give it?

"I'll give it to that officer," he decided. "He'll understand, I'm sure. And he's about my own age, too. And he looks calm and cool . . . as if he had plenty of common sense. Here goes!" The officer in question, a grey-haired Major, was looking at Potterat, who took his courage in both hands and approached him.

"Pardon, Monsieur, here is a letter. . . . May I explain? . . . The fact is, you see. . . . Well, anyhow, I must thank you for having fought in the cause of right. . . . My respects to you! . . . I wish you a very happy return to your home, and may you find your good lady and your children all well! . . . Are you badly wounded? . . . A leg, too! . . . Good-bye, sir! My respects!"

The officer took the letter. Whether it was the effect of Potterat's respectfully sympathetic voice and eyes, his warm-hearted good-fellowship, or the reference to his family, is uncertain, but the stern face was strangely moved, and presently a tear rolled down the tanned cheek. Seeing this, Potterat held out his big hand.

"I understand, sir, perfectly. In your place, I should feel just the same. True heroes are not made of stone. . . . On the contrary. . . . Vive la France, Monsieur!"

Too much moved to be able to speak, perhaps too recently freed from long months of iron self-restraint, the Major followed with his eyes the big kindly man, as he threaded his way through the crowd in search of some other hand to shake.

"Pardon, Madame, are there any wounded in this carriage?"

A woman, in a long white veil, marked with a red cross, turned at the sound of his voice.

"Ah, Monsieur. No one is allowed to come in here."

"Don't be afraid, I don't wish to break any rules, but I have one bunch of flowers left, a lovely bunch, see, of red, white, and blue flowers, the tricolour, hey? Perhaps you'd kindly give it to someone in there? From Potterat."

"My dear sir, these poor men in here are blind."

"You don't say so! . . . But they could smell them anyhow. . . . One can almost see a flower when one smells it. . . ."

The nurse was touched. She made a sign to the policeman on duty, who discreetly looked away, and said to Potterat:

"Well, you can come in just for a minute, and give them yourself."

Coming into this carriage, Potterat had a wave of the strongest sympathy and sorrow he had ever experienced. It seemed to him that he was in the presence of his judges, of beings elect through suffering. Timidly, dividing up his flowers, he placed some in the hands of the four men in the compartment. To the last one, little more than a boy, he said:

"Here are some flowers for you, my friend."

Not a movement was seen on the bandaged face. "I



am for ever alone in the depths of my sorrow and despair," it seemed to say. "Leave me alone, I am going back to my country, but I shall never see it more."

Raising a branch of fragrant bloom, Potterat said:

"Just smell that."

The young man smelt it, but remained unmoved.

"Is your mother still alive?" asked Potterat tenderly, and this time the boy's lips quivered, and he nodded 'Yes.'

"Ah, well, then, courage! . . . Courage for your mother's sake! . . . How she will rejoice to have you again, to nurse you and comfort you! . . . And perhaps Madame here will kindly give me your address, the addresses of all of you, and I will send you a postcard every week."

The blind boy, with a sudden gesture, tore off two buttons from his uniform, and gave them to Potterat, saying:

"Here! . . . Keep these as a souvenir. . . . And thank you very much! . . . Oh, but the time will be long, long! . . . I don't know how I shall live through it! . . ."

Potterat felt he could bear no more. He placed his hands on the boy's shoulders, leaned down over him, and kissed him on the forehead, then ran out so quickly that the nurse had to run after him to give him the addresses.

"You've done them good," she said. "I saw them smiling. . . ."

"It's they who have done me good, Madame. . . . Poor fellows! . . . What an awful thing war is! . . . I feel quite broken-hearted!"

When Potterat found Zimmerli, he dragged him away at once.

"Let's go, let's go! . . . I feel as if I should choke if I stayed another minute. . . . What misery and suffering! . . . Oh, war is horrible . . . horrible! To see that trainful

of young men, ruined for life, disfigured, without legs and arms! . . . And the most curious thing about it all is that they are so gentle, so unresentful. It's only me who wants to rave and storm, and to shake my fist. . . . I begin to think that it's not angry words that will do any good. . . . But isn't our part a beastly one? To be good little children, and eat our cake, and keep far away from the fighting! . . . Oh, it makes me perfectly wild! It makes me sick with everything and everybody. . . . I came, thinking to cheer them up a little, but I'm blessed if it isn't they who are the most cheerful after all! . . . But those poor men, what sort of a future can they have? . . . A man may get along somehow with only one arm, or one leg, but if he's blind? . . . Ah well, if they don't see victory, they'll hear it. The bands will play under their windows. Victory! . . . I pity those poor fellows who won't live to see that joyful day."

To all this Zimmerli replied only by shaking his head. When Potterat told him how many of the wounded had spoken gratefully of their warm welcome in German Switzerland, he brightened up.

"Oh, I've no doubt! They're just the same there as here. We must all agree that in this war, there are faults on both sides. . . ."

"No, Zimmerli, it's no use. . . . You'll never get me to swallow that. I'm not going to agree with what I think is a lie. Who was it who declared this war first? . . . There's all the difference in the world between declaring war and defending oneself, just as much as between giving and receiving a blow. . . . Was it France who violated Belgium and Luxemburg? . . . And what about Reims Cathedral? . . . And those asphyxiating gases? . . . That was the worst thing of all; for men to be struck down without a wound; one minute perfectly strong and fit; the next, spitting blood, gasping for breath, choking, and for weeks after, fighting for every

breath, dying twice over before they close their eyes. . . . That breathing was not much like your zither playing. . . .”

“Potterat, you’re absolutely on one side.”

“You’re quite right. I am. . . . I’m on the side of justice. If the English or the French had invaded Belgium, I should have been down on them all the time. . . . You may remember how I went on about that lawsuit in France a little while ago. . . . I am not biased, but I’m certainly against those who have bathed Europe in blood, thinking that they were going to snatch a hasty victory by taking everyone by surprise, and that very soon all would be forgotten. Because one is neutral, it doesn’t follow that one puts all common sense and judgment out of one’s head. . . . ‘Faults on both sides,’ indeed! . . . Let them bring back all the Belgians they have killed, and then we’ll talk about that. . . . I only hope that the dreams of those responsible will be haunted by the five millions or so of skeletons that this war of theirs has made, and I wish that they could be drowned in the tears of the widows and orphans. . . . I speak out plainly just what I think; I’m no friend of soporific patriotism! . . . Right is right, and crime is crime. . . . And a decent man will always stick to that, come what may. . . . If a man has to keep his mouth shut all the time, he’d be much more use in the world as a chicken or a rabbit. . . .”

Zimmerli, with his gentle faded face, his timidly pious little soul, his dream of a colourless heaven, retorted:

“We mustn’t judge others, my friend. We don’t know all the circumstances. There are all sorts of complications. ‘To know all, is to forgive all!’ you know.”

“Well, I’d punish well first.”

“Forgiveness is the noblest part. . . .”

"No, punishment. That's God's way, too. Look at the way the whole world has been under a curse this six thousand years past, just for an apple stolen in a weak moment!"

"The finest vengeance is forgiveness."

"Oh, your 'forgiveness' is what I should call 'funk.' . . . If you're such a saint as all that, just you go across the Lake, and preach that sort of thing to the Savoyard mothers whose sons they have killed, and see what they'll say! . . ."

"What about Napoleon?"

"Well, he was sent to die in exile. . . . That's all I ask for those who are responsible for this war. . . . This war has been forced on France, Zimmerli, . . . there's no getting away from that. And the proper thing for Switzerland to do is to proclaim that fact, and to act accordingly. When a country is afraid of taking its stand boldly on the side of right, it is very near the edge of a precipice."

"There will be no need to talk of precipices if only we are united."

"United in what? . . . That's what I want to know? . . . Is it in steering clear of offence, in equivocating, in sacrificing everything to getting in provisions? . . . Or is it in pride, in truth and honour, in horror of all that has been done? . . . When they invaded Belgium, they compelled us to take part in the discussion, as it were. Nobody but a poor brainless, bloodless thing of a man, or a country, but would feel compelled to give his frank opinion, a plain, downright opinion, an opinion which he would be prepared to defend, if necessary. Well, we've done that, but we're not doing it in the right way; we're doing it in a hole-and-corner fashion, behind doors, and in a day-after-to-morrow-rather-than-to-day style. . . ."

"But do you think of the consequences? . . ."



"My poor fellow! We had better die quietly to escape the danger of living. . . . We're getting very clever at calling things by other names. . . . You mustn't talk about crime now, but about a 'regrettable action.' . . . I suppose we shouldn't say a thing is round, but a 'rather exaggerated oval.' . . ."

By this time they had arrived at the third-floor landing of the flats.

"Well, I must think over what you've said," replied Zimmerli gently. "Good-night!"

"Yes. Think it over when you are in bed, Zimmerli. A good man like you ought to make up his mind for himself. Good-night! . . . Don't go to the wrong door as I did!"

It was now about half-past three. Potterat felt it would be impossible to sleep, so many thoughts were whirling through his brain, so he lit his pipe, got into his slippers, and began to walk round and round the dining-room table. He longed to put on the gramophone. . . . Why not, if he took the precaution of shutting it up in a cupboard? . . . A bugle call has an effect, even when it's muffled. . . . Instantaneously transported by the music into heroic scenes, enveloped in thick clouds of smoke from his furious smoking, Potterat disposed his troops, attacked, took three trenches at the point of the bayonet, captured a flag, and five mitrailleuses. . . . Two glasses of good white wine from *La Côte* refreshed him after his exertions. . . . After this his thoughts took another direction. He followed those blinded soldiers into their future lives. For the others, spring, summer, autumn, winter, would unfold their beauties in due succession; but for these it would always be night, one long night, stretching through days, weeks, months, years; always, always night! . . . Oh, here! This would never do! . . . Put on the gramophone again. . . . Another fanfare! . . . "That Major must have read my letter

by now, I expect. One never knows what good a little word may do, if it comes just at the right moment . . ." he reflected. . . . " He had a fine face, that Major, a handsome face, too, with his moustache, his round chin, his clear, shrewd, honest eyes, . . . a man after my own heart . . . and how he responded and understood, in a flash. . . . In this war, it seems to me, it is the duty of civilians to encourage the military all they can . . . a kind word, a kind thought, whenever possible, is a great help in keeping up a man's heart. . . ."

Then a great idea suddenly came to Potterat. To evolve it the better, he drank yet one more glass of wine. Then he put a sheet of notepaper in front of him; three times his pen approached the paper, and three times it was withdrawn, as he said to himself:

" Don't be a fool, Potterat! . . . A Major, perhaps, it might not seem so impossible; a Colonel, it would be a bit of cheek; a General would think you were presuming; but a Commander-in-Chief would simply think you mad! . . . Never mind, here goes! . . . Turn on 'Sambre et Meuse' . . . it sounds almost better in a cupboard than in the open air! Seems as if it came from the clouds. . . ."

As soon as it reached the point where the bugles ring out triumphantly, Potterat rushed back to the table.

" Take up that pen again," he said to himself. " Now then, short and sweet, that's the style! . . . You needn't be afraid of writing to good people. . . . Courage! . . . Only you mustn't hum and ha and beat about the bush. Go straight to the point. . . . You've been thinking about writing this letter for a long time. . . . Now's your chance. . . . One feels ever so much less neutral, somehow, at night, than in the day-time. . . . Go on! . . ."

His head bent low over the paper, his eyes fixed, his thick eyebrows frowning terribly, Potterat wrote:

‘TO GENERAL JOFFRE, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.

‘HONOURED SIR, AND GREAT COMMANDER,

‘I am one of the thousands of citizens, neutral by national obligations outwardly, but whose eyes are fixed on the Right, and who follow you, and encourage you, in thought. As you have plenty to occupy your mind, I will come to the point at once; we are counting on you to drive the invaders out of Belgium. . . . Beware of flank movements; continue to treat the soldier with sympathy, and at the right moment your arms will be crowned with victory. It is a Swiss who writes this, a pure-bred Vaudois, who loves his own country so much, that he wishes to see the complete restoration and purification of the invaded countries.

‘Your respectful and devoted

‘DAVID POTTERAT,

‘Retired Police-Inspector.

‘5, AVENUE DES ROSES,

‘LAUSANNE.

‘P.S.—This very night I took some cigars to your wounded soldiers at the station. They were very badly cut up, poor fellows, but their spirit is splendid. My respects.’

Having blotted it, Potterat read the letter over.

“That’ll do,” he said. “Matter and manner both are all right, I think. Now for the address: Grand Headquarters of France. . . . Anyhow, the postman will know where it is all right.”

Encouraged by this attempt, Potterat thought that while he was about it, he might as well write another letter, so he drew a second sheet towards him. He coughed respectfully, as one coughs on entering church.

“Ought I? . . . or not? . . . Oh, don’t be so silly! . . . Afraid of writing to a crowned head? . . . Bah! You’ll have all to-morrow and the next day to repent in. . . .

Good actions have to be done in a rush, one following hard on another. . . . And they say, too, that he is as simple as possible. . . . Much less proud than many ordinary people here. Now then, go on !”

‘TO ALBERT I., KING OF THE BELGIANS.

‘ MOST HONOURED SOVEREIGN,

‘ Honour to the people’s king ! We follow you here in Switzerland. You have won all our hearts. You will be a king for all time, not merely, like the others, for the duration of your life. You have never trafficked with dishonour ; from the first moment, you have taken your stand upon honour. It is the best place. I prophesy for you a splendid future. I am a Republican, but I cry with all my heart, “ Long live the King of Belgium !”

‘ From a Swiss who protests against greedy devouring kingdoms, and who has had, all through the winter, two Belgians at his table. (Pity it was so few !)

‘ DAVID POTTERAT,  
‘Retired Police-Inspector.’

He read both letters over again with delight, rubbed his hands, chuckled to himself silently, wrinkling up his eyes, and felt himself all at once very useful, and necessary to the honour of his country ; in short, the good man was inordinately pleased with himself.

“ Potterat, my boy,” he told himself, “ these heights of courage come very rarely in a man’s life. To write only to foreigners, even distinguished foreigners, is not the part of a good citizen. . . . Good things run in threes ! . . . In a democratic country like this, the private citizen may, and ought to, keep in touch with the authorities. Now, since you haven’t exactly been in agreement with their decrees for the last year, it might be as well for you to write and tell them so frankly, explaining your own point of view respectfully. You are



in the right: on principle, throughout your career, you have upheld the Government; you have paid your taxes regularly; you are free from debt; your private life and character have always been spotless; this being the case, you have a good right to put forward your point of view . . . and if, after all, they insist on bringing you to book for breaking the regulations, if they accuse you of giving information to foreign nations, because you have written to two well-known and honourable people, residing outside this territory, well, it can't be helped . . . you won't be the first to have made a mistake. . . . Major Davel did worse than that. . . . In a Republic, surely it is not a crime to declare to the authorities one's point of view, and to ask them a question or two . . . and that in the politest way, too. . . . Certainly it's not! . . . That Major has risked his life, and lost a leg: others have lost both eyes; surely I can risk something for a letter. . . . Not to mention that very likely they know nothing about it. This will give them something to think about. . . . Now, another March! . . ." and Potterat rose, went to the cupboard, and put into the gramophone the 'Cantique Suisse,' closed the door, and sat down again at the table. Very soon, inspired by the distant music, he began to write, his tongue between his teeth, multiplying his capitals, by way of emphasizing his respect.

'TO THE SUPREME FEDERAL COUNCIL.

' MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,

' In the present difficult times, the Authorities must naturally wish to be informed of everything of any importance. I feel it my duty, therefore, loyally to put you in possession of the following facts: Although neutral, I have written a letter of encouragement to General Joffre. Furthermore, having had two Belgians living in my house for some time, I have despatched a letter to

King Albert, to tell him how much all honest people approve of his actions and conduct.

‘The undersigned takes this opportunity also of expressing frankly to the Authorities his way of looking at recent Happenings. The said undersigned is neither a fine speaker, nor is he one of the party in opposition, but one who has always done his utmost to act in accordance with the ideas of the Government. On this occasion he can no longer do so, and this is why I have ventured to write. I may add that having had neither the time nor the means to attend the University, I hope that this will be borne in mind, if I should express myself in a manner calculated to hurt anyone’s feelings, or to offend. I will also add, that as Policeman first, and afterwards Inspector of Police for the town of Lausanne during thirty years and six months, I know by experience what it is to be exposed to criticism, and that it is often best to let the critics bray, and simply to carry out one’s duty, not always an easy task. But it has also happened that some of these criticisms have been really well founded, and I have acknowledged it by modifying my course of action in some degree accordingly. May I say that I fully realize the difficulties of the Authorities, and I do not wish to increase them deliberately.

‘This said, I will now come to the matter that is troubling me. I read yesterday evening in the *Feuille d’Avis* a Report of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry, a Committee composed of competent men, chosen by their country for the task, men like yourselves. “The village of Louveigné is in ruins. It was completely pillaged, and a great part of it burnt. Seventeen persons were shot point-blank.” There are over two columns of this sort of thing. I wish to ask you why, seeing that Belgium, a neutral country like ours, has been invaded without provocation, and overwhelmed with blood and ruin, in contempt of the treaty signed by a country which has

also guaranteed our neutrality, . . . why we have let all these months go by without protesting even so much as through the National Council, which would be less serious than a protest from the Federal Council? My opinion is that it was in the highest degree important to make this protest. There ought to be complete solidarity between all neutral and small countries: they ought to stand by each other. That outrage concerned us very nearly, and you may be sure that if we had been invaded instead, and if Belgium had protested indignantly, we should have been unanimous in our gratitude and approval. It is because of our Neutrality that we ought to speak out.

‘Everywhere we are held to be an honourable, fair-minded people, law-abiding, and with a strong sense of right and justice. It’s up to us to deserve that Confidence. Our Confederation ought, in justice to itself, to have lodged a solemn protest against the invasion and destruction of two feeble states, sisters in Neutrality.

‘Nothing, you understand, in the least resembling a declaration of war, but a sympathetic and indignant protest. Such a manifesto from the Federal Government, based on simple honesty, calmly and moderately expressed, would have made a tremendous impression on the world. . . . Even if we were taken by surprise in the beginning, we have had ample opportunities since. . . . Many innocent people; including women and children, and some Swiss among them, have been shot, . . . thousands of civilians, including three of our own compatriots, have been drowned like rats, without giving them time even to say a bit of a prayer. Hundreds of soldiers have been asphyxiated by abominable gases, in direct violation of the Hague Convention, to which their adversaries are co-signatories. The Armenians have been slaughtered like sheep at the shambles. Before this series of abominations we, who are supposed to lead

the nations in civilization, we have not uttered a word such as should spring spontaneously from the heart of a good man. As a nation, I mean. The people themselves, by disobeying the regulations at the railway-station, and breaking through the cordon of police in the name of Charity, impressed upon the foreigners in our midst the respect due to Switzerland. I must add, too, that a strong protest would have been of great value to our men on the frontiers. In these last months, when the whole of Europe is fighting and struggling for its life, such a protest, without violence or insults, would have been a safeguard for ourselves . . . and we should have taken our share to that extent. Instead of that we have drawn aside. But there are moments when a country ought to come forward, to speak out on behalf of right, even against the strongest. That is what makes a citizen proud of his country. All our trouble to-day comes from this unpardonable slackness and feebleness. How we should have flocked to the flag, and done our military service with joy and enthusiasm—which, I regret to say, is by no means the case at present: I know it from hundreds of witnesses—if only in those dastardly assaults upon a neutral people the nation had spoken out with no uncertain voice. For my own part, this silence has been a great grief to me. In circumstances like these the neutral who holds himself aloof timidly in the background has the air of agreeing to it all. Surely King Albert, who visited our National Exhibition the other day, and with whom you have shaken hands, who knows and loves our mountains, surely he merits better treatment than this at our hands! Some people say: "That would have driven us into a corner, and drawn us into discussions." Has not a clever orator proclaimed from the rostrum, "Necessity knows no law!"? No, there's no excuse. The thing was wrong!

'And that certain other neutrals are silent too has



nothing to do with it. In the first place, they are not neutrals in the same way as we are, with signed treaties; they have not our history; they have not our national songs; and most of them have all sorts of hidden schemes, ideas about colonies, *arrière-pensées* of annexation, and so on.

‘But we have clean hands. It is William Tell’s country, and no other, which ought to take the lead in doing the right thing; for no one will ever convince me that our neutrality absolves us from the claims of Humanity. Meantime, our brothers in neutrality are either dead, or scattered, or under a foreign yoke; the thought of their suffering brings the tears to my eyes. It would have been to the Glory of the Government to have intervened on the ground of respect for Treaties, ready to take the consequences of this Honourable Act, whatever they might be; we should have done our duty, at all hazards. Then, “On guard!” There are thousands of citizens who think as I do, especially amongst the mass of the people, who are the backbone of the Nation.

‘As for the provisioning of the Nation, which of course is the first consideration of those in Authority (and if I have permitted myself to criticize any arrangements on this score during these last months, I withdraw them completely. As a matter of fact, I have not hesitated to lay in provisions for my own family as far as I was able) . . . for the provisioning of the nation, I have nothing but praise and congratulations. . . . We are all grateful. . . . There is only the one Omission, which still persists. It is only by Acts of Honour and Pride, devoid of all provocation, that a nation so diverse in its elements as ours can be held together. Such an occasion as this is not likely to happen again very soon, and there are thousands of Swiss people who came back from abroad, who have gone away again, disillusioned. . . . Now, that’s true. And it’s worth thinking out. . . . We’re like a loose sheaf at present.

‘ I am writing this in the middle of the night, having just come back from saluting the wounded on their way through, and this is why I am writing at such length, for at night one is always less reserved than in the day-time. And I add that my gramophone is playing the “Cantique Suisse” for the third time in succession. That’s a guarantee of my patriotism, I think. Now, what I want to know is this: I have read and thought over your regulations, Gentlemen and Honoured Leaders, and the more I think of them the more bewildered I am. When one dishonours his signature, and breaks his word, how are we, henceforth, to describe these doings? If I say that this sort of thing is disgusting, abominable, am I vilifying a foreign Government? Am I holding it up to contempt? . . . Frankly, it seems to me, that it is the other who began. . . . And am I liable for that to six months’ imprisonment and a fine of five thousand francs? . . . I wouldn’t so much mind the six months, seeing that I am retired, and so have a good deal of time on my hands, but five thousand francs! . . . That’s making the truth very dear indeed! . . . In the schools our children are taught to sing “*De l’étranger méprisant le courroux.*” . . . Despising? . . . Is it against the law to say that? . . . Is it compatible with neutrality? . . . And wouldn’t it be as well, too, to fasten up some pages in our history books? . . . That part, for instance, where William Tell refuses to salute Gessler’s cap? . . . What was that but holding a foreign Government up to contempt? . . .

‘ Having served my country faithfully and honourably for the time hereinbefore mentioned, and having always been looked up to with respect by the people, I should like to know how I am to behave for the future so as to avoid making myself liable to an action? If, to avoid this, I must refrain altogether from commenting upon the Events that are happening in the world to-day, and from

calling things by their right names, I can only say that I have been too long accustomed to Liberty (these lines have just come into my head: "Guard our hearts from cowardice: Our Helvetia is free!") to be able easily to impose such a total restriction upon myself.

'And now the day has come, the sun is risen, and I must stop, for the broad daylight will rob me of the courage to approach you.

'I hope you will forgive the length of this letter. It is too long, I know, and poorly expressed, but it is sincere. And I beg you to accept, M. le Président and Gentlemen of the Council, the expression of my devotion and respect.

'DAVID POTTERAT,  
'Retired Police-Inspector.'

This letter finished, addressed, and sealed up, a sudden wave of doubt invaded Potterat's mind as the daylight strengthened and his heroism faded.

"Suppose they arrest you by return of post? . . . On the other hand, I have only told them how I feel, and asked them for a word of explanation and advice. . . . There's nothing seditious in that. Not to mention that I have told them the truth very politely. . . . Oh, look here, if you wait another quarter of an hour, you know very well that you'll never send that letter! Get out of this tunnel! There are too many tunnels. . . . And it's skulking in them that is ruining us! You're not going to skulk in one! . . . Besides, 'One for all, all for one,' remember. Since they are all for you, and all intelligent, educated men, they will take the thing in good part. . . . Ah, the belligerents will never know what we in Switzerland have suffered!"

It was done. The three letters had fallen into the letter-box. . . . The dawn was beautiful, the air blew pure and fresh through the trees, the birds were singing. . . .

"Well," reflected Potterat, "every man goes mad

once in his life, they say. . . . I felt as if I simply had to do it."

It was almost six o'clock by the time he got home.

"Oh, David, you have given me such a fright!" said his wife. "When I saw you hadn't been to bed all night! . . . Where have you been? . . . I wish you wouldn't go to the station like this! Here you are, all flushed, excited, upset! . . . Oh! this war! . . ."

"Oh, you mind your own business, my dear," replied Potterat, "and I'll mind mine."

"Well, do go to bed, David, and try to get a little rest."

He obeyed without another word. . . . But those letters! . . . He opened his eyes for a moment, then closed them again, and slept profoundly, heavily.

Madame Potterat gently closed the shutters, and then, before leaving the room, she looked at her sleeping husband. How he took this war to heart! Why couldn't he rest for a few days without exciting and worrying himself? . . . She determined to try and distract his mind at all costs.

He woke, and stretched himself.

"What time is it?"

"It's nearly twelve o'clock, David, we are just going to have dinner."

"Good gracious!"

Quickly he got up, splashed in the basin, and shaved himself. When he sat down to the table, it could easily be seen that he was hiding something. He kept laughing in his sleeve, he began to say something, and then pulled himself up, frowning uneasily.

"David, what is the matter with you?" said his wife, lovingly.

"Hey? What do you mean?"

"You're hiding something from us."



"Me! Not at all!"

"Father," struck in Carlo, "why didn't you go to bed until six o'clock this morning?"

Again he laughed to himself. And then, suddenly, not able to keep his secret from them any longer, he confessed coolly, his face betraying his ingenuous pride:

"Because I was writing to Joffre, to King Albert, and to the Federal Council."

"David! Are you mad? . . . This is terrible! . . . If you go back to that station, I tell you, it's all up with you! . . . And what on earth did you write on these letters, may I ask?"

"On them? The address, of course."

"And what else? . . ."

"Oh, only some political matters. Women don't understand these things. . . . But let me tell you about last night at the station. . . . It was splendid! Such enthusiasm! . . . Such a crowd! . . . Oh, there's no doubt our hearts are in the right place. We're a good people . . . only timid. We're afraid to risk anything. We're like some cocks, healthy and full of spirit and life, fine upstanding creatures, with red combs, and big spurs; but let a hawk sail over the poultry-yard and we scurry into the fowl-house in double quick time! . . . And we're all the same. My word! I had such a discussion with Zimmerli: I got quite hot over it, and after that I didn't feel like going to sleep, so, in a moment of absence of neutrality, I wrote a few words of encouragement to the first two, and of encouragement and explanation to the others. There! Don't let's talk any more about it! Only, if the police come for me, you'll know why."

Potterat took himself off somewhere for the whole afternoon. Perhaps he went to his favourite café, to tell his friends of the events of his wakeful night. During supper he was very gay, and rather depressed by turns, but in the course of the evening, he read the paper, played

with, and teased Carlo, and at ten o'clock as usual, they said good-night to each other. As soon as the husband and wife had retired, Madame Potterat said: "Well, I hope you're going to get some sleep to-night, anyhow."

"Not a wink, I'm afraid. I keep seeing those wounded men over and over again, those poor mutilated bodies, armless and legless, that Major, those blind men. . . . They haunt me! . . . To think that we've gone through life, up to now, with all our limbs, and with our two eyes, that we've been able to run, to see, to do things as we liked! Seeing those men makes one realize how thankful we ought to be for being spared. . . . We live among the things our fathers and our grandfathers lived with before us; we hear the clocks ticking that they heard in their day . . . and then think of those poor Cremets, for instance, where are they sleeping to-night? What is left to them? . . . They have lost their country, their church, their home. . . . Ah, a good many have lost in life's lottery. . . ."

The rising wind suddenly wailed through the shutters as if bringing something of human misery with it. Potterat's thoughts flew to the countries at war; he saw hapless creatures without shelter; he saw the dead bodies with their rigid faces, imploring help that never came; he saw great masses of men rushing out of trenches, and meeting other masses of men like themselves, differently dressed, and stabbing them with bayonets . . . and he said:

"History will come down heavily on certain heads. Some people will be cursed for all time. . . ."

"Come, David! You come to bed to sleep. . . . You worry yourself far too much about the war. . . . Look here! Let's go for a nice long walk to-morrow morning!"

"Poum!" replied Potterat, who was charging the enemy in imagination, at the head of a company.

"Come, come, David! Do go to sleep!"

"I'm thinking! I'd like to win a battle before I close my eyes!"

He seemed now to see his own country, its sleepy valleys, lulled by the sound of their waterfalls, its villages and towns, where honest magistrates were sleeping, their beards outstretched on the sheets. By way of rousing them, he said again:

"Poum! Poum!"

"David! You'll frighten those ladies on the second floor."

"All right! Besides, the battle is won. Go to sleep, my dear. Good-night, and God bless you! I love you very much."

For some months past, Potterat had roused everyone each morning at six o'clock by shouting:

"Get up, you neutrals!"

This morning he said nothing. His wife leaned over him. How soundly he was sleeping, smiling in his sleep, very calm, a little pale, and so still! Hastily, she put her hand on his forehead, and immediately she gave a stifled scream, and babbled words without meaning. Carlo came running at the sound of his mother's voice, and he, too, screamed, clinging closely to her. Then they ran out together, their arms round each other, terrified, they knew not why. A frightened neighbour knocked at the door, asked some questions, then ran to the telephone. Presently the mother and son returned, still with their arms round each other. They stood by the bed, and once more the mother put her hand on the icy forehead.

"David, David!" she cried.

"Father! Father!"

But he did not answer. The mother and son roamed from room to room in tears, repeating to all the familiar things, to the portrait of his first wife: "He is dead."

And presently a doctor with a square forehead was leaning over him. No, there was nothing more to be done. Without any suffering, he had passed away in his sleep, gliding, as it were, from one dream into another. To his loved ones, who leaned over him, who murmured tender words to him, he seemed to say:

“Don’t grieve, it is the universal law. Those who have gone before will be very glad to see me again. And you will come by-and-by, my dears. I love you so much, and I will look out for you. What can I say more? . . . I must rest now. . . .”

When the notice of his death, surrounded with a black border, and supplemented by these words: ‘Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled,’ appeared in the paper, people who had known him said:

“Oh! Potterat is dead!” And they added nothing more, for silence is the most beautiful elegy for those who are loved.

. . . A funeral advanced slowly, gravely, along the road, without any excessive travesty of grief, however. On the coffin were four wreaths, with ribbons fluttering in the breeze; one from the Police, one from his comrades of the rifle-corps, another from the members of his band, and a fourth from the Choral Society. Another carriage was almost covered with flowers sent by all sorts of humble friends, by fishermen, by commissionaires, old men and women, gardeners, a bunch of forget-me-nots from little Robert, the lame boy of the basement, and a bunch of roses from Zimmerli.

Behind walked the family. Ernest, who held Carlo by the hand; Schmid and his son Louis; some cousins from Romainmotier; other cousins from Thierrens; some of his Bioley friends; the Brise du Lac, with flags at half-mast, brass instruments glittering in the sun, and the red covers



of their music-books sticking out of their pockets; several police-officers, amongst them Boulenaz; and, bringing up the rear, a detachment of about thirty police-constables in full dress, commanded by Delessert.

At the sound of their measured tramp, tramp, several boys came running, their caps in their hands, asking "Who is it?"

Someone replied, "It's Inspector Potterat."

Shaking his head sadly, Bigarreau said to his neighbour:

"Poor Potterat! . . . We shall never see him again. . . . It's this war that has killed him. He fought it and lived it with all his heart. . . . Ah, he was a splendid fellow! One of the very best! . . ."

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